

## The After by RevlerRose

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**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Karen Wheeler, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

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**Summary:**

I can't let Hopper die. And, maybe, the Duffer brothers won't either but, until then, my imagination won't quit so you guys get this. If you've ever read anything I've written either here or on fan fiction you know I always end up in the bedroom but, I've got to work to get us there! I will mark smut heavy chapters and provide other disclaimers but, if you aren't a fan of smut just turn away now because that's where we were headed.

Hopper didn't die. So let's bring him home and give the family a few chapters of something akin to a rest before their next adventure. I think they deserve a little break, don't you?

I usually post once a week but, I'll try to hammer this one out a little faster if I can.

## 1. Dream a little Dream of Me

### Author's Note:

I own nothing! If I did I wouldn't be paying off student loans and chipping away on contract work to make the due date for the electric bill.

All that in mind these characters are the sole property of Netflix and the brothers Duffer. I appreciate them letting us play with their toys in the off season!

The following chapter contains references to torture, imprisonment, and has what the kids call 'strong language.' None of this is overused but, it could be construed as graphic in several sentences. Consider yourself warned! :)

Oh, and I know she never calls him 'Dad' in the show. But, the heartsick parent in me just needed to see it in print. So....let me have that one okay? ;)

\*\*\*\*\*Eleven\*\*\*\*\*

The dreams had started about a week after they left Hawkins.

Short at first.

Black water; thick like oil.

A body. A large body in the distance. Face down. Naked. A pale reflection against all the black.

She woke in a cold sweat. She knew, instinctively, who it was but, it wasn't until the third night that she was able to move closer. The image changed a little every time. The third night there was blood.

Too much blood.

She pushed through the air, against it, to move closer. Angry red

welts covered the body's back. Splits in the skin bled freely into the black oil. He was curled onto himself, holding his feet in his hands. Trying to press the flayed flesh on the bottoms together. Hold it together. Trying to get the bleeding to stop. She almost saw his face, but she couldn't get close enough. She woke with a sense of relief and panic wound through her spirit that she didn't understand. He was alive but....

'Pain,' she whispered against 3am.

Night seven she finally saw his face. He was in a brown jumpsuit, with a ratty slip of a blanket around his shoulders. His feet were wrapped in dirty strips of cloth and, as he looked vacantly into the middle distance, her dream began. "Dad," she silently screamed into the black. He didn't move. She pushed forward against the air but, lost the vision almost as soon as it began.

Gasping she sat up in bed. "Too much feeling," she whispered to herself. "Concentrate."

Nights eight and nine were lost to sheer exhaustion. She tried. Living in such a small space with Mom, Will, and Johnathan all crammed together she could barely let her mind wander before Mom came in to tell her goodnight or Will was in her room trying to explain to her why MacGyver was the better than Miami Vice.

Jonathan was the one that saw her nose bleed again for the first time. He thought she'd left her radio on by mistake. She convinced him that it was the air. Just the dry cold air.

Night ten she made it to him. All the way through the water, the thickness of the air, the small room. His face was covered in a thick bushy beard, his eyes were blank, and his hair was shaggy and past the bottoms of his ears; not yet to his shoulders. He was sitting on something. A ledge. A bed. She couldn't make it come into focus. "Ah.." she winced in pain and he shifted out of focus. It was like a knife through her head. It was like she was back with Papa. Little and learning all over again. She took two deep breaths and tried to look past the pain. She brought him back into focus and fell to her knees in front of his seated form. Sometimes they could see her. Maybe he could. She looked up into his face from her lower position and tried

to make him see her. "Dad," she said softly, "see me." There was no recognition. "I'm here," she tried. Tears fell. "Dad," her voice broke. "I need to see." Slowly, she reached forward and let her fingertips rest against his where he held the blanket's edge. The images came quickly, so fast, too fast, her breathing broke apart until it left her body entirely. The world crushed in on her and the ice cold pain that ripped through her skull made everything go black.

It was morning when she woke. Her face covered in dried blood. She rushed to the tiny sink in the bathroom before Mom had a chance to see. When she got there the world tilted again and she had to grab the edges of the sink not to fall over. The pain in her skull was still sharp but not as intense as the last time. She scrubbed her face clean in the tiny mirror above the sink and closed her eyes to quiet her mind. Slowly she reached into the basket next to the toilet and brought out one of Mom's crossword puzzle books. She tore a page from within and took the pen from the back of the book. She closed her eyes once more and tried to slow the images. It was a jumbled mess in her mind. The uniforms, the men, the pain, the monsters, he'd been to the other place, the upside down place, then; the cold, the bars, more men, different uniforms, the papers, and the numbers.....the numbers. She took a deep breath.... '56.1327\* N 159.5314\* E'. She looked at the numbers she had written and a whisper of smile slipped across the right side of her mouth. "I I know where you are," she said to her own reflection. "Alive."

It would be another week before she got her plan together. She needed the mostly empty bottle of gin from under the sink and to wait for next wednesday night. Wednesday night was girls' night. Mom stayed out with her new friend Diane on Wednesday nights until the clock said 11pm and when Mom came home Mom slept hard and didn't hear things in the night. She set her alarm for 2am just to make sure, but she never slept. She heard Mom come in, shut the door, and stumble into the bathroom. A short time later the toilet flushed and she heard Mom's door open and close across the hall. Then the duplex was quiet again. When the clock said 1:55am she turned off her alarm, slipped the previously pilfered gin bottle, now mostly filled with water, out from under her bed and quietly left through the front door.

Right three blocks, left two blocks, and then right again for twelve blocks. It was cold this time of year and she pulled her coat tighter against the wind; the gin bottle in a large paper bag she'd also claimed from under the sink.

David was right where he spent most nights, and most days; inside the phone booth she passed on the way home from school. He was drunk; like he was most days and nights. He was also waiting on her, just like she'd planned. When he emerged from the booth he looked nervous. His eyes flickering around everywhere but, her face.

"You got what we talked about girl?" He mumbled towards his feet.

She took the bottle out of the brown paper bag and held it up.

He reached forward with the clear implication of taking the proffered liquor.

She pulled the bottle back, "Call," she stated simply; pointing toward the booth.

"You're a weird kid," David whispered. He blew out a sigh and held out his hand palm up. "You got change kid?"

She nodded, reached in her jacket pocket and withdrew a handful of coins.

David's eyes lit up when she dropped the loose metal in his palm. It was more than enough for a long distance phone call. There was every possibility he would have enough for McDonalds in the morning.

She pointed back toward the booth and held out the slip of paper from the bathroom crossword book. On the opposite side she had carefully printed the phone number she'd found in Mom's memory. "Call," she repeated pointing back toward the booth.

David sighed again and snatched the paper. "Who does this number go to anyway," he mumbled as he walked back to the booth and slipped coins into the slot.

"Just say the words," she replied.

David rolled his eyes and dialed.

'Philadelphia public library,' the voice on the other end of the line spoke.

David turned away from the phone and looked at her, "Why the fuck are you having me call the library at three in the morning? Why is the Philly library even open now?"

"Read," she pushed the word through gritted teeth and, as she spoke, David swore he felt his chest tighten.

David blew out another sigh and, eyeing the gin bottle in her hand, spoke back into the handset. "Antique Chariot," David paused and licked his lips. "Fifty six point one three two seven degrees north by one hundred and fifty nine point five three one four degrees east," David paused and wrinkled his forehead at the writing. He looked back to the girl, she glowered at him and mouthed the word 'read' again. "Go get him," he said turning the scrap of paper as he followed the writing around the edge of torn edges. "He is still alive. Save him." David took the phone away from his ear, "That it?"

She nodded. 'Hang up,' she mouthed.

David shrugged and returned the handset to the cradle. He exited the booth and hand out he reached for the bottle. This time she let him take it as she turned to walk away.

She made it almost halfway down the block before she heard him yell.

"Hey," David called, "Hey girl, stop!"

She paused, looked over her shoulder and saw David with open gin bottle standing next to the booth an expression of fury darkening his crimson complexion.

"Girl, this shit is mostly water," he sneered. "You screwed me; this is not what we agreed on."

David took two steps toward the girl before he felt his body lifted from the ground. When his back hit the glass exterior of the booth he almost lost consciousness and when he leaned forward to catch his

breath he realized the glass behind him had shattered.

The girl shot him a self satisfied smirk as she wiped the blood from under her nose.

More terrified than he'd ever admit David was left to simply watch as Jane 'El' Hopper disappeared around the streetlight and into the chilly, early November, morning.

\*\*\*\*\*Joyce\*\*\*\*\*

Thanksgiving day Joyce Horowitz was lounging on her living room couch drinking bottom shelf whiskey and staring at her own reflection in the powered down tv. She was well and truly board to tears.

She had no reason to be. She could fill out the paperwork to finalize her name change. She finally had the fifty dollars in the bank to cover the fee at the county clerk's office. She could finally lose her legal connection to the name Byers.

She could attack the still full sink of dishes from the late afternoon Thanksgiving feast. Jonathan had tried to wash them for her but, she'd shooed him away from the sink insisting they get on the road if they were going to make it to Hawkins before midnight. That was almost six hours ago and, in the meantime, all she'd succeeded in doing was pouring herself two tumblers of cheap whiskey and missing her children.

All three had piled into Jonathan's knocking engine disaster on wheels and headed into the distance to meet up with Karen and Mike at the Wheeler's. El had been so excited. "The best," El had declared after dinner. "Soon we will be all together."

Everyone had gone quiet at the statement. Joyce rubbed the bridge of her nose at the memory. El had been doing so well before they left Hawkins. She seemed to understand that Hop was....

Joyce stood abruptly and crossed the room to the hook where her purse hung by the doorway.

No one really understood she meant Hopper at first. They were just

vague statements about things ‘getting better’ or ‘being together.’ It wasn’t until El had started talking about Hop coming back that Joyce started to get worried.

Joyce sat the tumbler of whiskey on the kitchen counter and used two hands to rifle through her purse in search of her smokes.

It started just after Halloween. Johnathan told her El had started getting nosebleeds again. When she confronted El about it the girl had insisted that it was the cold air. ‘No powers’ El had said.

Joyce lipped a smoke loosely and lit it with a long pull. Irritated with herself for lighting it without opening a window or going outside Joyce darted across the room to the window above the kitchen sink. She almost knocked the extra olive green tupperware into the sink. She’d left the clean plastic sitting out after packing leftovers.

El had smiled at her when she left her room that evening. “Don’t worry about me,” El had said, “We will all be okay soon. Dad will come back.”

Joyce took another drag and went back to rubbing the bridge of her nose. She waved her cigarette laden hand absently in the air. El hadn’t said Hop or Hopper she’d said ‘Dad.’ She’d never heard her call Hopper that in person. What was she supposed to do with that? Was this some kind of post trauma coping mechanism? The girl definitely deserved any mechanisms she needed but, Joyce knew this couldn’t be good. Joyce choked back a sudden sob on her drag. Hop wasn’t coming back. How do you explain that? Should she explain that? It wasn’t like she could talk to a doctor about El. A therapist? How would she even explain El’s existence? Joyce’s default response, at this point, was to smile and hug her daughter. Joyce sighed and put out her smoke in the water filled mixing bowl in the sink. “Fuck,” she sighed into the empty duplex. Having a formerly powered adoptive daughter was tougher than the legal paperwork made it seem; especially when you were the one who blew up her adoptive father.

Joyce jumped at the knock on her front door. She cut her eyes to the clock above the wall phone and her forehead creased into confusion. The time was well after eleven pm. The knock came again and Joyce



elected to ignore it, rather than answer. It had to be a mistake this late at night and if it wasn't she was far too intoxicated to deal with her neighbor's complaints about her kid's noise. They weren't even here, what the hell could Mrs. Nelson have to bitch about this time? She flipped off the kitchen light, knocked back her whisky and put the glass in the sink before tying her robe closed and turning down the tiny hallway toward the 'master' bedroom.

The shrill high pitch of the wall phone snapped Joyce's attention back to the kitchen. She stomped back before tearing the handset from the cradle. "I swear to God," Joyce started, "The kids aren't even here. What the hell do you want to complain about now?"

There was a pause.

"Joyce Byers," an unknown female voice stated.

"Not anymore," Joyce bit back. She paused, her recognition time dulled by the whisky; it wasn't Margaret Nelson's voice. "Who is this?" Joyce's voice cracked a little. She didn't know if it was the smoke, the whisky or the surprise of the unknown caller.

"My boss is at your door Ma'am," the voice replied. "We need you to answer."

"Wha...", Joyce stammered as she looked back toward her front door.

"This is in regards to a James David Hopper," the voice stayed flat. "Answer your door."

Joyce dropped the handset and stumbled towards the entryway.

## 2. NDAs and Coffee

### Notes for the Chapter:

Standard Disclaimer: I own nothing associated with Stranger Things. I have sprinkled in several of my own characters here as plot devices.

Also: So sorry this update is so behind! Work has been insane and I've been swamped. I'm already 1,000 words into the next chapter so, hopefully, the next one will not take as long!

Warning: This chapter contains very explicit descriptions of injuries sustained during torture and discussions of PTSD both post war involvement and post incarceration with the Russians. I am well aware this may be triggering for some readers. I speak only from personal experiences and do not presume to know everyone's experience with trauma. If anything described here sounds like it might be triggering please skip this chapter or read with caution.

\*\*\*\*\*Joyce\*\*\*\*\*

Four cups of coffee too many Joyce's left leg wouldn't stop shaking. The toe of her shoe made an echoing tap tap tapping against the industrial linoleum. The chair she occupied outside yet another, in a train of, doctor's office doors was ungodly uncomfortable and not designed for the hour plus wait between 'meetings.' She was the kind of uncomfortably hot that happened when you were nervous and not dressed correctly for where you were. The coffee made her skin prickly, the sweat pants she wore made her calf muscles drip with perspiration while the tank top she'd grabbed to replace her nightgown left her arms covered in goose flesh from the chilly late November air; even indoors. On her lap Joyce clutched a cardboard banker's box.

"Bring anything you have of his," the man in the suit had said. "Bring anything you think he might recognize."

That's how Joyce ended up in this hallway, holding a cardboard box with his uniform, a pair of jeans, a picture of Sara, his dog tags, and El's fall school picture. She'd had one of his flannels in the box as well but, mid-October, El had removed it to wear as a sleep shirt. On the top of the box Joyce balanced a stack of printed explanations and forms. Countless paragraphs on dozens of pages detailing Hop's conditions.

The first meeting in the early hours of the morning had been with a haggard looking charge nurse who'd handed Joyce a handful of sheets to examine as the man in the suit looked on.

"This is a boiler plate NDA," the man had said; sliding the first sheet across a reception desk inside the magnetically locked doors they'd entered together. "Non-disclosure agreements are pretty standard around here."

The nurse had given a half pitying smile as Joyce scrawled her name across the paper, "Can I see him now?" She'd half begged in a careful plea.

The nurse had shaken her head. "We've got a lot to go over here hun," she'd smiled with a kind of broken pity as she spoke and pointed toward the stack in Joyce's hand, "a lot."

They'd moved to a smallish office after Joyce signed the NDA. Then the nurse was first; outlining daily care instructions, bandage changes, and medication regimes. Then there was another hallway, another waiting area, and there had been an orthopedist. A pinched faced thin Asian man had pointed to so many x-rays. So many x-rays showing the sixteen breaks, four boxer breaks in Hopper's right hand alone, with other fractures littering his ribs, zygomatic arch, and one particularly bad one on his left tibia that had been set, upon arrival, during surgery.

A third waiting room. A third professional. This time it had been an internist. Hop would be fine; he'd assured Joyce. They'd fought sepsis on his arrival, most likely from the unset tibia break that had become badly infected sometime before his 'transport' from the Russian peninsula but, it was under control now. Joyce was so fucking tired by that point that she'd asked for coffee. He pointed to the stack of

papers and Joyce had relinquished them to his grasp. "You'll have to make sure he gets both the antibiotics and the pain management pills on a regular schedule," the plump faced specialist said with a firm tone, "but, don't give them all at the same time because they can be rough on the digestion and, he'll need to take them with food. For the time being he'll be on them indefinitely. But, we'll have him in and out here for the foreseeable future and adjust the dosages as needed." Joyce looked at the sheet, one of the nurse's originals, there were sixteen pills a day here, Hopper would be eating a lot of applesauce. Joyce had made notes. So many notes. And, still, they wouldn't let her see him.

A podiatrist and a physical therapist tag teamed the meeting that started at four am. Joyce had just been starting her fourth cup of coffee by then. Hopper had been punished ... tortured... by something called bastinado. Joyce had written that down. His feet, the therapist explained had to be debrided and sewn back shut upon his arrival. It was the podiatrist's belief that the dozens of shallow whip marks on the bottoms of Hopper's feet contributed to the sepsis the internist had spoken of earlier. Joyce wrote that down too. While none of the flay marks were deep the criss crossing shallow cuts had most likely been caused by a thin rod or leather strap. "It's more common in the middle east," the physical therapist had said as he check marked a talking point off his list, "these types of injuries inflict maximum pain without immediately causing the possibility for loss of life." It had the added benefit of temporarily crippling the victim to limit the possibility of escape. Joyce's pencil lead had broken during this sentence; followed quickly by her resolve. They'd left her alone to cry and gather her thoughts. Once alone she'd smoked a cigarette, flicked the ash in the corner trash can, and stubbed out the butt on the no smoking sign by the door.

Now, Joyce found herself in yet another waiting area, a hallway, this hallway, with her box, her notes, and her thoughts. Still no Hopper. It was obvious, from each meeting, that these people, NSA, CIA, FBI, Military, whatever, wherever she was, they wanted her to take Hopper, for him to leave with her and then for her to bring him back; for continued treatment? But, they still wouldn't even let her see him. Each doctor acted like that wasn't their decision. Yet, they were treating her like she had to be prepared to take him where; home? A

hotel? Did they think she was staying here? Joyce looked both ways down the hall she sat in and noted the locking, wire mesh covered doors at both ends. Was she going to get to leave here? Fuck. "Fuck," Joyce breathed to the hallway.

Tap tap tap tap tap

Joyce grabbed her own leg in an attempt to get it to stop.

Tap tap tap tap tap

"Joyce Byers," a deep timbre voice with a slightly eastern European accent spoke behind her.

Startled Joyce stood suddenly the box hitting the linoleum with a loud 'thwap' and the stack of white papers cascading to the floor. She turned in place, her face screwed up and red, fists balled at her sides, Joyce stamped her foot; "Take me to see Jim Hopper, Goddamnit! Right fucking now."

The man behind her, unlike most of the other's she'd seen, wasn't wearing a white coat. His polo shirt was open at the collar with the bottom edges tucked into loose fitting chinos. He gave her a soft smile. "If you'll step into here Ms. Byers I'll take you to see Mr. Hopper shortly."

Joyce gritted her teeth, her jaw clenching, and she picked up the bankers box and moved into the indicated office.

"My name is Kaihan," the man in the polo shirt said once Joyce was seated on the other side of a large dark wood desk. "I am a clinical Psychiatrist."

"I want to see Hop," Joyce gritted out.

"In a minute," Kaihan replied as he reached into his desk and withdrew a thick manila folder. "Joyce, how much do you know about post traumatic stress disorder?"

Joyce gave an exaggerated sigh. It was going to be another meeting. She reached down to her feet and picked up possibly the only sheet of paper left that didn't have notes scrawled all over it. She felt a hand cover hers on the desk and jerked back.

“Ms. Joyce,” Kaihan spoke softly, “You don’t have to take notes. Any questions you have I’d be glad to answer but, I’d much prefer you listen to me intently for a few minutes and then we’ll go see your Mr. Hopper.”

Joyce found herself holding her momentarily touched hand to her chest as if she’d been burned.

“I can tell you are skeptical Ms. Joyce,” Kaihan continued, “but, I can assure you that if you’ll give me five solid minutes of your time I will take you see Mr. Hopper.”

Joyce nodded.

Kaihan smiled softly. Joyce found it vaguely reassuring the way a paternal figure’s smile should make you feel.

“Post traumatic stress disorder is a condition that has only recently been named,” Kaihan started. “It has been called a myriad of titles over the last two hundred years. The oldest documented cases were during the Civil War. To paraphrase, in the most concise way, some persons who experience very traumatic things may not be able to move forward from them. They may experience nightmares,” Kaihan paused, “Hopper has been experiencing nightmares and flashbacks. His anxiety has become very heightened. He is existing in a constant state of watchfulness, not able to relax or fully calm his mind. What this means for you, as his caretaker, is that you need to be prepared for outbursts, mood changes, and to act as a solid anchor to keep him calm.”

Joyce stared at Kaihan, eyes wide, lower lip caught between her teeth. “I am going to be his caretaker.” Joyce didn’t phrase the words as a question but, she didn’t really mean it as a statement either.

“Yes,” Kaihan replied.

“Away from here,” Joyce said.

Kaihan smiled again. “Yes.”

“I get it,” Joyce began softly and her voice grew as she spoke. “I get it. Okay? I got it when the nurse told me about the whip marks. I got

it when the orthopedist told me about the bones. I got it when they told me about the sepsis and the cuts on his feet and,” Joyce’s voice began to crack as she reached an officially hysterical volume, “the fucking torture. He was fucking tortured. I get it.” Joyce’s chest heaved as she stopped speaking. She took stock of herself and was relatively surprised she wasn’t sobbing.

“I am glad you understand,” Kaihan responded calmly. “There is one more thing I want you to understand; you must expect the unexpected. PTSD is a ugly and unpredictable. Mr. Hopper’s body will heal; his mind will take much longer. He may appear to get better, relapse, and have to fight his way back to clear thought again. The nightmares he is having are particularly volatile. He has become physically violent with some of our night staff. You must be very careful in attempting to wake him.”

“Hopper would never hurt me,” Joyce said.

“This is not the same Hopper you had a funeral for,” Kaihan said.

A whisper of a sad smile ghosted across Joyce’s lips and she looked at her feet. “You know about that?”

Kaihan tapped the file. “We know about everything.”

Joyce looked up, evenly meeting Kaihan’s eyes. “I would like to see him now.”

Kaihan nodded standing with an exhale, “This way Joyce; you can leave the box and your notes here. Bring one item though. Something you think he might recognize.”

Joyce chose the photo of El. His daughter; their daughter.

It was just the end of the hall. Joyce listened to an obscenely loud buzz when Kaihan swiped a small plastic card and the door clicked open. The door gave way to a small white foyer and five steps later Joyce found herself staring through a double plate glass window set into a metal door. Inside she could see a hospital bed, empty, several machines she didn’t recognize, most of which appeared to be off, a small doorway to the left, possibly a bathroom but, it was dark, and a

television. Joyce gasped and placed her palm flat on the cool metal to ground herself. Directly opposite of the doorway was a wheelchair, facing away, she couldn't see the face of the occupant but, she could tell from the shoulder breadth alone that it was Hop. Joyce's face crumpled and she slid down the door pressing her forehead to the metal. Her face felt hot and the door felt good. Like the tactile sensation reminded her that this was really happening. She was careful as she went down not crumple El's school picture in her left hand.

"I...", Joyce started. "I...", her chest heaved and she felt firm hands on her shoulders. She flipped in place so her back was against the door and Joyce faced Kaihan. He was crouched in front of her bringing his face even with her's. His face was irritatingly placid; calm.

"You can do this Joyce," Kaihan spoke softly.

Joyce realized that she'd been shaking her head 'no' without speaking. She stopped and focused on nothing but her breathing.

"We have done everything we can for him Joyce," Kaihan continued. "His body will heal. You are, literally, the only thing he's asked for. You," Kaihan reached down and circled her left wrist bringing up the photo, "not even her. He needs this, he needs you to be strong if he is to get better."

Joyce nodded.

Kaihan stood and extended his hand down to Joyce. Joyce stood without his help.

"Are you okay?" Kaihan asked as Joyce smoothed her tank top back into place and adjusted her bra strap.

Joyce gave him a weak smile. "I'm so fucking far from okay," she said. "But, every time I've needed him he's been there." Joyce swallowed audibly. "When he wasn't okay he was there for me. When the world wasn't okay, when our lives were anything but okay, he was there. He gave me his daughter in his will. Even when we thought he was dead there he was trusting me; me whose life is never



okay. We were never ...together but he trusted me that much. It doesn't matter if I'm okay he's the only thing that's ever made anything in my life ...okay."

Kaihan nodded once, reached around Joyce, and swiped a magnetic card through a reader next to the door. There was a loud buzz, a click, and the door opened.

\*\*\*\*\*Hopper\*\*\*\*\*

Hopper kept his eyes open as much as possible now. He stared at the white painted wall of his room. Over the last nine days, give or take, he'd been able to identify dozens of inconsistencies in the paint. Brush marks, tiny bumps in the paint, dirt, and even tiny fibers from the brushes were left in the white wall at which he chose to stare. He stared because he couldn't close his eyes anymore. If he closed his eyes he might be back there. It was stupid really. He'd spent months, a year almost, outside Pleiku. In mud and shit and horror he'd killed, stalked and killed more. He didn't talk about it anymore. He'd done what he did to survive. And, when he came back, Diane had helped. After practice, after a few years, he didn't think about it anymore. He didn't dwell and, when Sara was born he had other things to focus on until all of that seemed a distant nightmare that he put away.

This, this was different.

There wouldn't be a Diane.

There wasn't a Sara.

At this point he wasn't sure this wasn't all a trick again. They'd done it before; made him believe he'd been rescued in an attempt to gain information. If this wasn't fake they could've brought him Joyce by now. They'd asked about his daughter but he wasn't that stupid. He wouldn't admit El's existence; not without knowing, for sure, he was safe ...that this was all real. The longer he was here the less sure he became that any of it was.

Hopper rubbed the bridge of his nose. Staring dried out his eyes but he didn't have a choice, he couldn't close them ... not again. Hopper ground his teeth and, just for a second, accidentally really, his eyes

fluttered in a blink. “Fuck,” Hopper barked his hands going to the wheels on either side of his chair. This time it had been a demogorgon; face bloomed out into a mawing, screaming hole. He focused on calming his breathing. “Fuck,” he mumbled again. “Don’t close your eyes you dumb fuck,” he whispered to himself rubbing his forehead with his non bandaged hand. “You know that.” Behind him; the door buzzed.

“Breakfast time already,” Hopper boomed. “Don’t even start with me about getting out of bed on my own. You guys take for fucking ever to get in here in the morning and I can’t lay around on my ass all day. I have to sit around on my ass all day,” he joked spinning his wheelchair with his left hand. “What’s on the menu to ... “ Hopper stopped short, the words dying on his tongue.

She was the most beautiful goddamn thing he’d seen in years. Her auburn hair was wild and obviously uncombed, she was wearing a stained light blue tank top and hideous army green sweatpants. Hopper’s breathing wouldn’t regulate and he gave a strange bark of laughter when he realized she was wearing two different shoes. He rubbed his good hand across his face, “Joyce?” Hopper heard his voice say her name before he realized he’d said anything at all. The voice sounded broken, hopeful, and far away. Hope was so far away. But, maybe it wasn’t, because, she was right fucking there; seven feet away, right across the room and he couldn’t look away. She was crying and nodding; her hand over her mouth, her back against the door, and her chest heaving. Hopper rolled forward a foot and, as he watched, the beautiful woman against the wall took a step forward. “Joyce,” this time Hopper knew he’d said it. More an identification than an anything. He took his hand away from face and rolled forward again. There was something in her hand, a paper, or, a picture. He held out his left hand to her, leaning forward in the chair. If he could just touch her he could know she was real.

As Hopper watched she shuffled forward the last few feet. Her face was swollen and red; streaked with tears. God she was beautiful. “Joyce,” Hopper heard his voice now, firmer, his voice, the one he’d misplaced so many months ago. “Joyce, I need you to take my hand.” That did it. She touched him. The cool, slightly damp, fingers of her right hand drifted along his palm before resting at the pulse point of

his wrist. As Hopper watched the movement he realized both their hands were shaking. Slowly Hopper rotated his hand until their fingers and palms met mirroring each other. She intertwined her fingers with his and her grip suddenly became tight. She was real, she was solid, she was here ... right now. She wasn't a hallucination. He tightened the grip. She wasn't going to dissolve. She tightened her grip and fell to her knees next to his chair.

"H.... H.... Hop," she leaned forward on her knees and laid her head against his leg. She would not let go of his hand. Hopper pulled his bandaged right hand across his chest and laid it on her head. He could feel her hair on the tips of his fingers where they protruded from the end of the bandages.

"Joyce," he prayed out her name.

"Hopper," she sobbed as he felt her wind her arm around his left thigh. When Hopper looked down at the arm around his cast laden leg he saw she was holding a glossy eight by ten photo of El. In the picture El was looking up and to the left. Her hair was longer and secured in a high side pony tail with a familiar blue hair band. Hopper realized that his vision was blurring and he didn't have a hand free to wipe his eyes.

"Joyce," he felt his own tears began to flow. Looking up momentarily he noticed the shrink, Kaihan, at the door. As Hopper watched the psychiatrist used his badge to open the door and slipped out; leaving him and Joyce to their reunion.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

If you or someone you know is struggling post trauma getting help is not weakness. Please start with <https://www.ptsd.va.gov> or call the PTSD alliance at 1-888-436-6306 to find resources in your area.

### 3. Nightmare Recovery Plans

#### Notes for the Chapter:

I do not own Hopper, Joyce, or anything to do with Stranger Things. If I did I wouldn't be making payments on an eight year old car!

This chapter was rough for me. I'm not a dialogue type of person and this transitional chapter was mostly that. I always second guess and delete things, reword, and delete again when it comes to trying to capture voice. I know, in advance, this chapter is on the slow side, but I had to get my characters from A to B so this is how I chose to go. Hopefully everyone stays for the ride.

**WARNING:** This chapter does deal with the continued fallout of PTSD. Please be aware.

It was a safe house. A four bedroom, two bath, two story, old as hell, beautiful, farmhouse. Complete with chipped paint and a breezy front porch Joyce felt like she'd stepped back in time.

It was a full day before they were able to leave the compound and get to that safe house.

Prior to leaving they'd allowed Joyce to make phone calls. Whatever she needed. About two hours after they'd finally let her see Hopper she'd been debriefed as to the plans for the immediate future, offered a shower, a change of clothes into scrubs, and an opportunity to call out. She just couldn't say why she was calling out. They'd made a backstory for her. Her Grandmother, in Iowa, was being transferred into hospice care, and was expected to pass away sometime in the next month. Joyce was to say she was the only living relative. She wanted to be there for her Grandma. She'd called her boss, who had explained that the hardware store didn't have paid leave, but he wouldn't fire her. She should be there for her family and he was so sorry for the trying time. Second Joyce had called her landlord, just to let him know that she wouldn't be back for a while and her rent

check would come via mail from Iowa. She explained her children would be returning before her and Jonathan would be in charge of things around the duplex. So, if anything went wrong he would be the person to speak with. Joyce relayed the same cover story to her landlord who expressed his condolences.

The last phone call had been the hardest. The Wheeler's. After feeding her cover story to Karen, God she hated lying, she'd asked to speak to Jonathan. She could tell he was confused.

"Grandma?" Jonathan phrased it like a question.

"Is Mrs. Wheeler still in the room?"

There was a long pause. Then muffled, as if he was covering the phone, "Mrs. Wheeler can I talk to my Mom alone?" When Jonathan's voice returned it was clearer. "Both your Grandmas have been dead since before I was born. What's going on?"

"Baby I'm sorry," Joyce took a breath, "I can't tell you right now."

"Are they back?" Jonathan whispered. "Are they coming for Will?"

"No," Joyce said.

There was another long pause.

"Are you okay, Mom?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm good; tired but good."

"Tell me what's going on."

"I can't Jonathan but," she paused, "you'll be the first to know when I can."

"What do you need me to do?"

"I have to be here for a few weeks. I need you to look after your brother and El. A man will be coming with money. More than we're

used to so it should be enough to get you through until I get back without any problems. The rent will be paid by mail so you don't need to worry about that. The keys to my car are on the rack by the door."

"Mom?"

"Look, if I could tell you I would. But, I can't. You're just going to have to trust me. You are all safe. I just can't come back for a while. But, when I can I will and I will call. I will call and give you the number where I'm staying as soon as I'm there."

The third long pause.

"What do I tell Will and El?"

"Tell them I love them. Tell them I'll be back soon."

Jonathan sighed. "I want to know what's going on."

"I know; I'm sorry." Joyce waited for him to reply and when he didn't she took a deep breath. "Tell Will and El the cover story while you're at the Wheeler's. They won't know the difference. By the time you get home in a couple of days I hope to be able to talk to you all about what's happened."

"Do you want to talk to them now?"

"God yes but, no. I don't think I could lie to them too."

"I love you Mom."

Joyce felt tears threaten her for the millionth time that day.

"I love you too Jonathan."

That had been one of the worst phone calls of Joyce's life. She prided herself on honesty with her children and this inability to share one of the most amazing things in her life with her children left a knife wound near her heart.

Joyce had been accompanied back to Hopper's room after that and

was surprised to find him dressed in royal blue scrubs similar to the ones she'd been given. His excess of hair had been trimmed and combed, his beard was cut back to a human length and she could see he'd bathed.

"They say we're getting out of here," Hop had said giving her a lopsided smile.

"That's what they tell me too," she answered.

"The kids?"

"Jonathan is taking care of Will and El. They're at the Wheeler's for Thanksgiving and..."

"Jesus," Hopper cut her off. His face looked ashen and mildly distressed.

Joyce cocked an eyebrow and walked closer reaching out to put a hand on his left forearm.

"It's Thanksgiving?" Hopper met her eyes with a horrified look, "That's all?" Hopper scrubbed his bandaged hand across his face.

"Hey," Joyce reached out with her other hand and halted the movement of his bandaged palm. "Talk to me," she said, "tell me what you're thinking."

"It's nothing," Hopper wouldn't quite meet her eyes at first and, when he did, she could see the confusion and hurt there. "I just," he started, "I thought...." he trailed off. "I really thought it had been longer than that."

Remembering Kaihan's instructions off one of the many sheets of paper she'd added to her stack Joyce pulled over a chair and sat next to Hopper. She took hold of his left hand and laced her fingers through his. "Okay," she said.

Hopper raised a brow, "Okay?"

"Yeah, okay," Joyce replied. She was unsure what to do. He was obviously distressed, but she didn't know if it was because he'd lost

track of time or because he thought he'd been there longer and he hadn't. Either way she'd written down 'be there for him' at least three times when she was trying to remember everything Kaihan had said on the way to the shower rooms where she cleaned up. So, "Okay, like do you want to talk about that? Or do you want to just sit here? Or do you want to talk about something else?"

Hopper looked a bit taken aback by this response. "I," he started then paused and seemed to lose focus on something in the middle distance. Joyce felt his hand tighten on hers. "I don't fuckin' know Joyce."

Joyce took her other hand and cupped Hopper's cheek. He leaned into the touch and closed his eyes before he let out a sigh and a soft smile slipped across his lips. "I'll wait here until you do," Joyce breathed.

Hopper opened his eyes. "You know what I see when I close my eyes around you?"

Joyce shook her head.

"Nothing," Hopper replied. "For the first time in weeks I can close my eyes and see just black. It's....," Hopper closed his eyes and leaned against her hand once more, "peaceful."

It was another four hours before they were disturbed again. Kaihan and a younger looking man in a suit, who introduced himself as Baxton, came to Hopper's room with a pleasant looking round faced nurse who wore her fire red hair in a tight high bun.

The nurse produced two bags. One had a pharmacy's supply of pills while the second contained a drug store aisle of bandages, topical ointments, and several roles of medical tape. Instructions could all be found on the initial sheets that Joyce had been given; the nurse had explained. Together they found themselves escorted out of the building and to a white panel van that had a special armature to lift Hopper's wheelchair.

A short twenty minute drive later they arrived at a farmhouse. A safe house Baxton explained. "We can't be sure, outside of the compound,



of Russian influences. This will be best until you're fully debriefed and healed."

They stood on the front lawn with Hopper's chair on a paved walkway that led toward a ramp onto the front porch. Hopper jerked his chin toward the house, "It's two stories," he grumbled. "Not exactly great for a guy," he paused to gesture toward his leg, "in my condition."

Baxton took ahold of the handles on the back of Hopper's chair and began to push. "Almost everything you'll need is on the main level. There's a basement, a cellar really, that we use to store extra furniture, canned goods, and the like. And, there's an upper level with a couple bedrooms and a second bathroom. The main level has the master bedroom with a king bed, a retrofitted bathroom with accessible utilities for the chair, and, what I hope, is a fully stocked kitchen." Baxton made a face as they started up the ramp. "Your transfer was on short notice so the other agents didn't have a lot of time to get things set up. You can tell me whatever you need and I can get for you from one town over."

Baxton put a key in the lock of the front door and, after turning it, pushed the door open and dropped the key in Hopper's outstretched hand. When he took his position behind Hopper again he continued, "Whatever you need means whatever. I can get you food, toilet paper, clothes," Baxton stopped talking as the chair came to an abrupt stop. When he looked up he realized that Hopper had used his good hand to grab ahold of the door frame stopping their progress.

"Mr. Hopper?" Baxton attempted to push the chair forward again and watched as Hopper's grip tightened.

"Hop," Joyce tried as she put her hand on his shoulder.

"We can get what we want in town. Joyce could go if you leave her the van or a car." Hopper's voice was low and sounded strangely dangerous to Joyce.

Baxton was silent.

"Are we allowed to leave?" Hopper practically growled the question.

His voice had a low and gravelly tone that Joyce had only heard a time or two before.

Joyce's attention turned to Baxton and, as she watched, his lips pursed and shoulders sagged slightly. "Mr. Hopper I think you know that, for now, that answer would be no."

"Phone," Hopper growled. "She needs to be able to call her kids."

"Mr. Hopper please," Baxton started. "You know that kind of behavior could..." Baxton pushed firmly on the chair which still wouldn't pass the threshold, "Please let me take you inside."

"Look, kid," Hopper shoved back roughly against the door frame; causing Baxton to stumble back. Hop took the opportunity to spin his chair in place before sizing up Baxton face to face. "You don't want to let us go to town, fine, that's a suit decision. You don't want to tell us what's going on exactly, fine, that's up to you guys. I can't complain about the care so far and I know that you're probably the low guy on the chain to get a shit duty like this one one. But," Hopper's voice rose, his left hand came up and started to emphatically point stab the air. Joyce's eyes widened, "I'll be Goddamned if you're gonna tell this woman she can't talk to her kids. So I don't get to talk, that's fucking fine, but, she didn't do a Goddamn thing to get here other than come to help me. So fuck your bullshit security standards. You know where she fucking lives go install some secure lines and shit. Monitor the fucking calls just make it happen."

Baxton raised his hands, palms out, in surrendered placation. "I am low man on the pole. I'll see what I can do, but I can't promise shit."

Hopper spun the chair and wheeled himself through the door on his own.

It took a little over an hour to get 'settled.' Basic drug store brand toiletries stocked the bathroom, two toothbrushes in clear plastic on the sink. The kitchen had a variety of canned goods and some fresh produce and meat in the fridge. The bedroom was occupied, mostly, with the promised king bed turned down with soft light blue sheets and a dark blue comforter. When Joyce opened the closet she was

surprised to find a variety of women's slacks and button down dress shirts that appeared to, mostly, be in her size. Baxton startled her when he spoke, "If anything doesn't fit I can have it altered or returned. If you want something else all you have to do is let me know. We had Mr. Hopper's sizes from the hospital but, two of the female officers took a guess for you."

"Are we really not allowed to leave?" Joyce turned away from the clothes as she spoke.

Baxton looked defeated. His young features seemed weighted with age beyond his years. "Mr. Hopper can not yet leave. He has to be fully debriefed and his current psychological condition makes that difficult. I do not have a say in the final decision. We can not detain you but, if you go it would be difficult to bring you back. I can't see this lasting more than a few weeks. It is my understanding the brass has made every accommodation for your children, work, and housing situation. I know it sounds strange but, look at this like a vacation maybe?"

Joyce didn't speak but, smiled and held up a slip of paper between two fingers.

Baxton stepped forward and took the proffered slip. Opening it he, read and, raised an eyebrow.

Joyce smiled again. "I'm not the best cook but, your kitchen is light a few staples. This should get us through the week easily."

Baxton nodded and put the paper in his pocket. "I'll have it delivered tomorrow morning. The nurse will be by around 10am to check bandages. We should be able to have someone drop it off around then."

They heard the toilet flush from the other room and Joyce gave a half smile and stuck out her hand. "It was nice to meet you Mr. Baxton," Joyce shook his hand firmly as she finished. "I think it would probably be best if you were gone by the time Hop got out of there."

Baxton nodded and exited the bedroom toward the living room and, eventually, the front door.

Joyce strode to the living room behind him calling out, "Oh, and Baxton," Baxton turned to meet her call. "Figure out the phone thing. I told my kids that I'd call them."

Baxton didn't reply and left through the front door. Closing it behind himself.

Exhausted; Joyce eyed the padded armchair in the living room.

A short time later Hopper emerged from the bathroom. He rolled to a stop next to the overstuffed armchair Joyce occupied. She had curled herself into a tight ball and was dosing when he came to a stop and started talking. "This place is kinda incredible. They've got bars and stuff in there," he said jerking his thumb toward the bathroom, "much easier to get in and out of this stupid thing." He tapped the chair's handles to indicate his meaning. "Where'd the suit go?"

"He left with my grocery list," Joyce said.

Hopper looked momentarily defeated. "I'm sorry about that," he mumbled. "I didn't think they'd lock you down too." He looked back to her face, "Did he say anything about a phone?"

"He said he was going to ask. I have to be able to call them," Joyce said, "I'll sneak into town if I have to."

"If you leave I'd understand." Hopper's words came out rushed and Joyce uncurled herself from the armchair in response.

Joyce leaned forward and covered Hopper's uninjured left hand with both of hers. "I'm not going anywhere Hop. I'll sneak out in the middle of the night to call if I have to but, I'm sticking to your side until I can take you home to our daughter."

A strangely sudden sob escaped Hopper as he pulled back his hand and dug his fingers into his eyes trying to stifle tears. Joyce slid from the chair onto the floor and put both her hands on his knees. "Woah," Joyce started, "what happened? What did I say?"

Hopper took his hands away from his face and used his left hand to cup Joyce's cheek. "Our daughter," he whispered.

Joyce smiled. “She’s just like you; you know. She’s a total pain in the ass.”

Hopper choked on a laugh.

“Hey,” Joyce continued, looking at the clock and stifling a yawn, “I want to have this conversation. I want to tell you everything, but I’m about to fall asleep sitting up. Do you mind me using the bed for a short nap?”

Hopper wiped at a stray tear from his face. “Actually, I was thinking maybe you’d help me into bed. This has been,” he sighed and waved his hand in the air indicating his lack of adjectives.

Joyce chuckled and nodded.

Fifteen minutes and some change later Joyce and Hopper had worked together to get him into the king bed. Both were breathing heavily. Joyce put her hands on her hips and, with a satisfied nod of her head, looked down at Hopper’s prone and sweaty form, “well that wasn’t hard.” Hopper divulged into laughter and Joyce wasn’t far behind him. When she got herself under control Joyce continued, “do you need anything else before I head upstairs?”

Hopper suddenly looked panicked and grabbed for her leg with his bandaged right hand. “Don’t,” he breathed.

Joyce wished she was confused, but she wasn’t. “Are you sure?”

Hopper nodded.

Joyce sat on the opposite edge of the bed and toed off her shoes before climbing in next to Hopper. She was careful to leave a full foot of space between them for fear she’d bump a bruised or broken bit of his battered body.

Hopper was laying on his back and reached out with his left hand feeling around for her. Finally his hand found hers and he interlocked their fingers. “Joyce,” Hopper said.

“Yes.”

“Don’t leave.”

Joyce squeezed his hand. “Okay.”

She must have slept but, how could she be asleep? She was drowning, unable to breath. Her throat closing off Joyce awoke with a muted scream. Her hands clawed for her throat, but she could not get that far, she couldn’t breath. She couldn’t see anything in the dark and panic seized her. “Jim,” she choked on the name as she listened to a terrifying low voice she’d never heard come from Hopper before.

“Не в этот раз,” the voice growled.

Joyce tried to focus. She was pressed against something solid. Solid and breathing. It was Hop; her back to his front. His right forearm pressing dangerously against her artery.

“Чертовски комми кусок дерьма,” the voice, Hop’s voice, growled again.

Joyce felt herself losing consciousness again. This time it wasn’t from exhaustion. With everything she had she grabbed Hop’s bandaged hand and squeezed. The forearm pressing against her went slack and Joyce felt something solid slam into her back sending her petite frame forward off the bed. She caught herself on all fours coughing; trying to regain her breath.

“Joyce,” Hopper’s voice cut through the dark in a panic. “Joyce; Goddamnit what’s going on?”

Joyce staggered to her feet and toward the doorway lifting herself just enough to hit the light switch before sliding back against the wall to sit under it.

Hopper had himself propped up against his left arm, eyes wild as he searched for her. When he saw her his face fell. “Joyce,” he croaked, “what the fuck happened?”

## **4. Fashion Faux Pas and History Lessons**

### **Summary for the Chapter:**

Good Lord I'm behind!!! Family crap + work promotion + the last edit of my book coming back with more red on it then a bad dye job and I just let this one slip!

Please forgive me friends. I kind of wrote myself into a corner on the last chapter so, let's get out of it, what do you say?

Next chapter will have a bit of a time jump so we can get to some of the fun bits. Everything should be up by the end of the first week of January 2020. Thank you to everyone who's still reading and Happy Holidays.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Disclaimer: Obviously I am not the Duffer Brothers, I do not own these characters, and I make no money off of anything within.

Warning: This does continue a look at PTSD and some damage done to Joyce as a result. As well as mentions of past domestic violence.

It took Joyce nearly ten full minutes to push the armchair from the living room into the bedroom where Hopper stayed prone on the bed. She tried to get him to talk to her before she left for the chair but, every time she got close he looked the other direction.

“You’re being a child, Hop,” Joyce reprimanded. “Just look at me,” she pleaded.

“I could have killed you Joyce,” Hopper rasped to the opposite wall.

“You didn’t Hop; you stopped.”

"I stopped because you crushed the shit out of three broken fingers," Hopper countered. "What if I hadn't had a broken hand Joyce? What then?"

"Then I would have thought of something else Hop!" Joyce's voice raised with her frustration level. "Jesus Christ Hop, it was an accident." But, that had been when things changed; when Joyce had taken her usual way out of a fight. Frustrated beyond the ability to form words she'd stormed for the door and, just when she'd stepped flush to the threshold, she'd heard his choked cry. It sounded for all the world like he was in actual pain. As if someone had reached inside him and wrenched the broken noise from his soul.

Joyce stopped with her hand on the doorframe and remembered his words from earlier when they'd gone to bed. 'Don't leave.' Shit, she couldn't storm off. She just couldn't. "I'll be right back Hop." When she said the words she spoke away, toward the living room, and slowly took her steps over the threshold. This time there was no noise.

That was how Joyce found herself sweating and irritated arranging the armchair next to Hopper's side of the king bed. The tiny alarm clock on the bedside table read 3:46 am. Hopper still wouldn't look at her as she walked past the other side of the bed and pulled an afghan from the chest of drawers that were pressed against the far wall.

"I'm going to turn off the light Hop," Joyce offered as she passed the doorway again, "but, I'm not going anywhere. I'll be right here in the chair." Hopper didn't reply as Joyce turned off the light, arranged herself in the armchair, and covered up with the afghan.

"Joyce," Hopper's voice cut through the dark.

"I'm here," Joyce said.

"Thank you," Hopper replied.

"Go to sleep Hop," Joyce said, "and; you're welcome."

Shortly after nine in the morning Joyce awoke to a banging on the front door. She answered wrapped in the afghan. A bright faced



younger nurse, two men in suits and Kaihan were all standing on the other side of the entryway. Much to Joyce's dismay all displayed appropriately horrified looks at her appearance.

"Jesus..," Joyce croaked before, startled at the gravel in her own voice, she stopped abruptly and brought a hand to her throat. She had intended to finish the sentence with 'mornings are rough for me but....' instead she found herself letting out a hiss of pain when her fingers touched the exterior of her throat. Even without a mirror Joyce knew the bruising would be extensive. She'd gotten into it enough with Lonnie to know what a nasty bruise felt like six hours after the fact.

Kaihan gave her a tight smile, "I told you to be careful when he sleeps," he murmured lowly as he strode into the living room.

The nurse and one of the men in a suit got Hop up while Joyce let Kaihan examine her throat. Less than fifteen minutes later she had been declared medically sound with a bruised trachea and, an even more, bruised ego.

Hopper would barely look at her while the nurse tied a colorful, decorative, navy scarf around her neck.

"It's light and almost see through," the nurse said, "that way it doesn't look like you're hiding anything but, with the navy will camouflage the bruises...." The nurse trailed off as Hopper wheeled himself out of the room with a noticeable shudder. A low tone could be heard from his direction after he left the room.

Joyce scrubbed her closed eyes with the palms of her hands.

"He will move past it," Kaihan said softly from his seat on the couch. "I'll talk to him about it in our session."

The nurse and Joyce unloaded groceries and bedding from the small truck outside while Kaihan had his 'session' with Hopper. Joyce was putting a frozen rump roast in the kitchen sink half full of warm water to thaw when she heard something roar and a something break in the bedroom occupied by Kaihan and Hopper. Joyce made for the door but, was stopped, when the nurse grabbed her arm and shook

her head. “He’ll be fine honey,” the young nurse said. “You’ve got to let the doc do his thing.”

Joyce clenched and released her right fist multiple times before nodding, backing away, and saying nothing.

Kaihan exited the bedroom thirty or so minutes later. He nearly tripped on the doorjamb as he left, his attention being diverted to a notebook he was grimly examining on his way out. Kaihan stumbled slightly and looked up meeting Joyce’s gaze. “Be careful with him tonight. He is exceptionally distraught regarding your condition. However, I have assured him that your injuries look work worse than they are. No permanent damage. I would not recommend losing consciousness next to him again until the nightmares are greatly decreased.” Kaihan shifted his attention to the young nurse, “Karen,” he said, tilting his head towards the door.

The nurse and the man in the suit started towards the door. Joyce felt panic bubble up in her throat. “Wait,” she called. Kaihan stopped short, looking back, single eyebrow tilted. “What the fuck am I supposed to do today? Is there therapy or something? ‘He is exceptionally distraught,’ that’s all you’re going to leave me with? Really?”

Kaihan strode into the kitchen area and took Joyce’s hand. Joyce felt that familiar sense of paternal protection wash over her, as she had the day before at the hospital. “You take it one step at a time.” Kaihan spoke softly and deliberately. “I will be back everyday until I feel progress dictates that we can go every other day and so on. We will make it work. Until he is fully debriefed neither of you are in this alone.” Kaihan paused again and looked towards the sink. “For today, I recommend pot roast.”

Joyce found herself nodding.

Kaihan reached into his jacket pocket. “Almost forgot,” he said smiling, holding up a card, “we got permission to let you call through the dispatch center.” He laid the card down on the counter. “You call the number on the card, tell them the number you wish to call, and then they will connect you. All calls are monitored, of course, you must stick to your cover story for the time being, and I’m afraid Jim

is not quite stable enough to speak with his daughter, yet, but, we want you present here so I explained to my supervision that this was the best option.”

Joyce continued nodding. “Thank you,” she whispered as her fingers played lightly across the card.

And, with that, Kaihan made his exit.

Twenty minutes or so, and a bag of peeled potatoes to mash for dinner later, Joyce peaked in the bedroom to find Hopper staring out a window.

“Hey,” Joyce tried. There was no movement from Hopper. Joyce stepped across the threshold. “Now you’re just being rude,” Joyce grouched. “I mean I know you’re going to blame yourself about what happened last night and I know I can’t talk you out of it but, for God’s sake at least acknowledge me Hop. Also, what did you break in here? I heard something break.” Joyce rambled as she walked across the bedroom to his chair and sat on the edge of the bed. She reached out and touched his shoulder lightly. “Hop?”

Hopper’s skin twitched as she made contact but, he still didn’t verbally acknowledge her. Joyce put her hand on the edge of Hopper’s chair and rolled him back from the window. What she saw made her give a sharp inhale. Hop’s face was a swollen red mess. His eyes, while no longer crying, were wide and watery. His lower lip was chapped to the point of blood and, when she crouched lower in front of his chair in an attempt to make eye contact, she noted that his eyes wouldn’t focus on her. “Hop,” she whispered, “I’m okay. I’m here. Where are you?”

Hopper’s eyes darted around the room before settling on Joyce again. “You remember back in ’78 when you were working part time at that gas station on fourth?”

Joyce nodded but, crinkled her brow at the abrupt change of subject.

“I knew you and I were,” Hopper faltered, stuttered, and restarted. “I knew then that we,” Hopper stopped again searching for the right words. “I knew that we would always be around each other, even

back then,” he finally got out. “Sarah had just,” Hopper paused, “It was after Sarah had died and I was in a bad place. Probably still am. And, I walked in there, to that gas station, and saw you there and, it was like you knew. You already knew that I couldn’t talk about it and you didn’t even try. You just sold me the twenty four pack of rot gut cheap ass beer and told me that you hoped Diane and I could,” Hopper used air-quotes for the last line, “find peace this holiday season.” Hopper stopped and scrubbed his good hand over the rapidly forming five o’clock shadow. “Anyone else I would have fucking killed right then but, with you, there was no judgement or pity I just knew you really meant that. And, then,” Hopper turned his gaze back toward the wall momentarily, “I looked at you when I left and you lifted your arm to waive at me and smiled,” Hopper rambled the sentence together, “and when you lifted your arm your shirt rode up and I saw these bruises all over you side and back.”

Joyce’s lips pursed together. A canine worried a chapped bit of skin at the corner of her mouth.

Hopper looked back, “I knew what that was, Joyce. I knew exactly what that was, I was a goddamned beat cop, and I did nothing. I was too wrapped up in my own shit to take care of the one person who was genuinely kind to me that entire year of my shitty existence.”

Joyce reached out to touch Hopper’s arm and he pulled away from her. “I decided, after that, that I would put Goddamned Lonnie Byers in the ground if I ever saw another bruise on you. But, I never did again. I had lots of suspicions but I never actually saw another bruise again and, I can’t help but wonder how many nights I could have saved you if I would have said something then.”

Faster than Joyce would have thought possible from such a large man Hopper’s left hand came to her throat.

Hopper was genuinely shocked when Joyce didn’t jerk back. Using the deft fingers of his left hand Hopper loosened the navy blue scarf at Joyce’s neck and gently let it slip from her form onto the floor. Joyce held absolutely still as Hopper’s fingers gently slipped across the mottled blues and purples that stood out in garish detail against the paleness of her skin. “I never saw another bruise on you,” Hopper whispered, “until now.”

Joyce let her hand meet Hopper's on her throat. Hopper tensed as he felt Joyce push her hand over his and push his fingers around the column of her neck. Joyce spoke at full volume then, accentuating the gravel in her voice from her bruised trachea. "Hear me please James Hopper," she ground out as she pushed the palm of his hand around her bruised trachea. "You didn't do this to me." Joyce took her other hand and gently squeezed the broken fingers of Hopper's right hand. "The people who did this," she said indicating his hand, "did this," she finished as she squeezed her fingers around his around her throat. "You, could never hurt me." Joyce took her hand away from his broken digits and let her fingertips play through the stubble along his jawline. "And, as for Lonnie Byers," she whispered, "well...." Joyce had intended to end this sentence with a flip 'well fuck that asshole.' But, something about her ex-husband's name changed the air between her and Hop. Hopper's lips parted slightly and a broken growling groan emanated from somewhere deep in his throat. Suddenly his hand was no longer on her throat, it was tangled in her hair; palm cupping the back of her skull. Joyce found herself drug the last eighteen inches from her spot on the bed across the arm rest of Hopper's chair and until she was scant millimeters from Hopper's face. Her hands went to his shoulders to steady herself and her breath was taken, in that moment, in the form of a sharp gasp. Hopper stopped short. His eyes looked panicked; unsure. Joyce took a shaky breath. Hopper's nostrils flared slightly.

"Hop," Joyce squeaked.

"Yeah," Hopper breathed.

Neither moved, frozen in the moment between them.

"What are we doing?" Joyce whispered.

"I think I'm apologizing," Hopper replied.

"Then maybe you should get on with it," Joyce breathed.

"Tell me it's okay," Hopper hummed. "Tell me you want this or tell me to stop."

Joyce closed her eyes and when she opened them again Jim Hopper

saw a hunger there. “Shut up and kiss me Chief,” Joyce sighed.

It could only be a kiss, for now. Jim Hopper was too broken to make it anything but. But, if a kiss was all he got Jim Hopper was going to make it count. It started out soft enough, her pouty lower lip gently folded between his. As he let her mouth go so they could perform the mundane task of breathing he peppered small pecks around her mouth, nose, and across her closed eyelids.

Joyce sighed as Hopper’s massive hand kneaded the back of her head.

When Hopper felt her body relax into his chest he let his tongue seek entrance at the seam of her lips. And, when they parted for him, he groaned into the sweetness of her mouth. She tasted like citrus and hope. He slid his tongue along hers dueling for dominance of the coupling. Then, suddenly, she was pulling away; all too soon. He tried, briefly, to hold her to him with the hand at the back of her head but, when he felt her hands surely press against his upper chest he immediately loosed his grasp on her. Hop’s chest was heaving as Joyce slid slightly off the armrests and back onto the bed’s edge. Then, without another word, Joyce stood, bent, and kissed Hopper on the forehead.

“Joyce wait,” Hopper mumbled, fearing he had done something wrong as he watched her stand from the bed and started to walk toward the doorway.

Joyce stopped and closed her eyes. “Hopper,” she said, as loudly as she could, “if I don’t leave this room right now....the things I want.....the things I’ve waited for,” she paused and Hopper didn’t miss the slight press of her thighs together. The tiny action did things to him that he thought died in a Russian prison months ago. “I have a pot roast to put in,” Joyce suddenly announced. “We’ll pick this up, um, later.”

Hopper watched her go and for the first time in the last three days, didn’t panic when she left the room. He knew she was coming back. He knew they were coming back, from all of it, together.

## 5. Unusual Sets of Circumstances

### Summary for the Chapter:

\*\*\*\*DISCLAIMER      HERE\*\*\*\*\*Money?      Nope!  
Ownership? Nope! Greatest respect for creators? You  
bet your ass I do!\*\*\*\* The Following chapter  
continues our discussion of recovery from trauma  
both body and mind. There's also a little over the  
clothes stuff insinuated but, if you've read this many  
chapters you know what I write so have fun.

Next Chapter - Hopefully, next week. Should be time  
for some sexy times! Just have to get his leg  
plausibly healed enough. Ugh!

The next three weeks slid by in such domestic bliss neither Hop or Joyce really had a second thought about their shared space.

The night of their first kiss Hopper didn't see her again until she called him out of the bedroom for dinner. He'd come rolling out cautiously, eyes seeking her out, half afraid that his newfound sense of contentment and security would be suddenly pulled out from under him. What he'd been greeted with was something else entirely. She'd been standing by the table; a steaming pot roast, flanked by a bowl of mashed potatoes, on her left and a bowl of dinner rolls balanced against her hip. She'd looked positively domestic and Hopper didn't know if his mouth had watered more for the food or subtle sweet curves of her petite body.

"I'm a famously bad cook," Joyce had said, smiling, "but, I didn't burn anything." Hopper had given a bark of laughter. The pot roast hadn't been great. Really it was mediocre at best; a little tough. The potatoes were okay, the green beans were from a can and the bread was, well, store bought dinner rolls. For Hopper, and the amount of attention he actually paid to the food that night, it could have been a seven course meal at a five star restaurant and he would have loved it the same. They kept the conversation as light as could be expected, given their current situation.

El's first public school experience; a pep rally where she enjoyed the jumping and acrobatics performed by the high school cheerleaders. El wanted to try out for the team when she hit sixteen; Hopper did not approve.

Johnathan's new job for the local free newspaper's real estate section. Johnathan now photographed houses for a steady paycheck with a bonus each time one sold. Hopper did approve.

Will's newfound interest in recreating all of MacGyver's gadgets. Hopper was confused as he had no clue who MacGyver was but, after a lengthy exposition from Joyce, felt that following in MacGyver's footsteps sounded dangerous.

Really, to an outsider looking in, the meal, the conversation, even the couple would have seemed positively boring. Any random 'Joe' would have assumed the couple was sharing a standard weeknight meal catching up on the day's events surrounding their children. The greenish blue bruises that still decorated over half of Hopper's face were well camouflaged by a days worth of stubble and, while his chair would have been obvious, anyone who didn't know better would have assumed Hopper was the unfortunate victim of a car wreck.

Joyce took stock of that moment, in that moment, and, years later, would return to it in her mind. It was the first moment when she realized how deliriously happy being ordinary could feel.

After Joyce cleared the dishes Hopper took the opportunity to pull her into his lap; his bandaged hand banding across her waist. She squeaked and held her weight slightly aloft with her hands on his armrests as his injured left forearm banded around her waist. Hop's stubble covered chin rested on the soft curve of her neck from behind and his breath came out from behind in the shell of her ear. Gooseflesh prickled along Joyce's neck.

"Dinner was good," Hopper mumbled as he ran his nose along the space behind her ear.

Joyce chuckled, "No it wasn't."



“Company was exceptional.” Hopper peppered light kisses along Joyce’s neck and the top of her shoulder.

Joyce pushed off the chair and gave a secondary derisive chuckle; her hand going to her neck to rub where Hop had kissed.

“Joyce,” Hopper reached out with his left hand and grabbed Joyce’s palm. “Did I do something wrong?”

Genuinely shocked Joyce spun in place before crouching by Hop’s chair. She reached out with her left hand and stroked along Hop’s jawline. “No,” she paused and her eyes searched around the room, seeming looking for the correct words. “You didn’t do anything wrong.” Joyce faltered half a smile. “It’s just that this isn’t ever really what I expected. But, then again, I don’t think you really planned any of this out either.”

Hopper gave a hollow bark of laughter and used his good hand to clutch her palm to his face.

“Hop,” Joyce paused and grabbed a dining room chair, pulling it close so her aching knees could catch a break. “I won’t lie, there is a problem.” Joyce lurched forward and caught Hopper’s lips by surprise. The kiss turned hungry almost instantaneously. Hopper’s mouth parted and his tongue pushed its way past her lips; taking with it a deep moan. Joyce returned the fervor in kind; her free hand finding his inner thigh and sliding forward as she leaned towards his form. Forgetting herself, forgetting everything for just a moment, Joyce let her hand continue to caress the smooth lines of his thigh tracing higher until Hopper brought her back to reality.

Hopper broke the kiss and hissed. An odd noise that bordered on pain emanated from his chest. Joyce lightly leapt from her chair, eyes nervous.

“That’s the problem, Hop!” She exclaimed in her gravel over bourbon bruised voice. I can’t hardly touch any part of you without hurting you.

Hopper’s mouth opened and closed twice and Joyce gave a sad smile, closed her eyes, and rubbed the bridge of her nose. All she could

think about in the moment was, for all the world, how he looked like a fish when he made that face.

“Joyce.”

Joyce opened her eyes and looked back toward Hopper’s seated form.

Hopper shook his head lightly. “I nearly fucking killed you Joyce.”

“But,”

“Don’t interrupt,” Hopper’s voice changed timber’s slightly betraying agitation. His eyes softened; “Please.”

Joyce licked her lips but kept silent.

“You said this ‘isn’t really ever what you expected,’ well,” Hopper shrugged, “me neither. I won’t get into what it was like over there Joyce but it wasn’t as nice as someone accidentally touching a broken leg. The whole time I was there, both places, all I could think about was you and El. I knew you would take her. I knew you would. It wasn’t like I hoped, I knew, in my soul, that you wouldn’t let any harm come to my girl. And, then I thought about all the things I never did for you.”

Joyce didn’t realize she was shaking her head until Hop spoke again.

“I hid behind chivalry, honor, but, when Bob slid in there first,” Hopper squeezed his eyes shut and clenched his fist, “I was kicking myself so hard. After a piece I saw how happy he made you though. I tried to accept it and just be your friend, like I always was, but instead I made a jealous ass of myself. And, then, Bob ... ,” Hopper trailed off making a hand gesture in the air.

Joyce wiped a stray tear.

“I kept thinking,” Hopper continued, “while I was hiding from those things or just living through those minutes, trying not to freeze, I kept thinking how much regret I left behind. How I’d never get to walk either of my daughters down the aisle. How you’d probably let El keep seeing that Mike kid. The cases I didn’t solve. The dates I didn’t take you on. The Fall Festival in the town square. How I never

got to slip the kid who runs the Ferris Wheel a five spot to stop it with us at the top. I'd think about never getting to kiss you; hold you against me. How there would be no more fights with you. How I never got to make it up to you; any of it." Hopper's voice dipped a half an octave and Joyce felt a shudder terminate at the base of her spine when he spoke. "I thought about the things I never got to give you. The ways I could have touched you if I hadn't been such a coward. How I was going to die without ever knowing what you tasted like because I never asked you to let me make you come."

Joyce let out a little gasp, her eyes widened fractionally and Hopper gave her half of an exhausted smile before continuing.

"When shit got really bad, when I couldn't think, when I couldn't even picture El or Sara's face anymore ... ," Hopper's voice trailed and he stopped, coughed, and cleared his throat. "I could still picture you. Standing there, in the store, in that stupid smock behind the check out counter; ready to tell me what an idiot I was for this or that. You, standing there, always ready to correct me, prop me up, show me a better way. Always ready to make me ... better."

Hopper's hand shot out again and encircled Joyce's wrist; pulling her back down to his level. She stumbled and gasped as she caught herself on his chair, rocking it slightly from the impact. Hopper kept control and tucked her arm around his side and bringing her body to lay evenly across both armrests. His bandaged right hand caressed her left hip as his left hand gathered the hair away from her neck. Hopper leaned in and let his lips and stubble wander across the pale expanse of her neck, settling just below her ear before he spoke again. Hopper's voice dropped, yet again, when he spoke. "So, here's the deal, Babe."

Joyce shuddered slightly.

"I can't fuck you, yet," Hopper paused to let the tip of his tongue reach out and barely trace the shell of her ear. He was rewarded with a slight gasp. "That doesn't mean I can't do anything." With careful teeth Hopper lightly nipped the lobe. "That just means I have to be ... creative."

They made out for over an hour. After a few initial minutes Joyce

requested a break and they moved to the couch where they could both be more comfortable. As it became more and more evident that the heat between them wouldn't wain Hopper knew he had to find a stopping point before he passed out from sensation overload. He wanted nothing more than to rend her clothes from her small form and fuck her into a coma. But, between the pain of his leg, the fogginess of the ample painkillers, and the exertion of the last hour Hopper was genuinely surprised he hadn't succumbed to plain old exhaustion.

As Hopper paused he stroked the side of her face before letting his hand fall artlessly to his lap. "So," he said smiling, "MacGyver?"

Joyce laughed. "Yeah," she sat up a little on the couch. "He helps people. Will loves it."

Hopper kissed the top of Joyce's head, "Wanna see if it's on?"

"Sure," Joyce took the hint with ease and reached forward to flip on the set. After a few moments of channel surfing she realized that tonight wasn't MacGyver's scheduled time slot and they settled on local news.

Joyce folded into his side, foot elevated on a kitchen chair, belly full and and as sexually sated as currently possible Jim Hopper felt life, in this moment, couldn't get much better. The next three weeks would bring more of the same. Sessions with Kaihan were interspersed with visits back to the hospital. The hand bandages came off a few visits in; they were replaced by athletic tape and a set of physical therapy instructions.

When they got home in the afternoons long talks, dinners, extended make out sessions, and local news became Hopper and Joyce's routine. Eventually they did find MacGyver. Hopper enjoyed it. He found the pretense extremely unlikely but who was he to judge? The things that happened in Hawkins, Hopper couldn't begrudge an unusual set of circumstances to any man. Hop's 'whole damn life was unusual.' And, a scant three days short of Christmas, that was the phrase Hopper chose wrap up his therapy session with Kaihan. Kaihan responded by telling Hopper that he believed Hopper was ready to call his daughter.

## 6. Phone Calls and Personal Care

### Summary for the Chapter:

\*\*\*\*\*DISCLAIMER\*\*\*\*\*

I own nothing  
I make no money  
and these folks don't belong to me

The only thing that's mine is my thirst....and I'm a thirsty bitch.

\*\*\*\*WARNING\*\*\*\* - Gets a bit smutty in the second half but, it's just gonna get more so in the next chapter and I am so not sorry.

Last chapter is chugging along but, I am SO BUSY at the paycheck work. I'm trying guys... I'm dying to find out what happens myself!

When Joyce got home from her walk she found that Hop had already been dropped off by the hospital's transport. He still used the wheelchair to get around outside the house but, inside, the physical therapist had switched him to a walker, cane or crutches to get around. He really had dealer's choice of the three but seemed to strongly prefer the crutches stating that the walker and cane made him feel too old.

It was with the crutches that Joyce found him when she walked in the door she'd almost come to call home. The wheelchair was parked by the door and Hop was seated on the couch with the crutches draped across his good leg. His 'bad leg' was elevated on an otoman and the telephone was perched on his lap. Hopper was scowling down at the phone. His left hand draped lightly over the handset while the pointer finger of his right hand tapped awkwardly on the off yellow cradle.

“Hop?” Joyce said his name with a lilt at the end, making it a question.

Hopper turned his head slightly to acknowledge her presence but, didn’t speak.

Joyce crossed the room and found her place next to Hopper on the couch. Sensing something had happened, but not quite sure what, she took her cue from the time they had spent together over the last few weeks and stayed silent electing, instead, to place her right hand over his left on the handset of the phone as it rested in the cradle.

Hopper eventually released an exaggerated sigh. “They said I could call,” he mumbled.

Joyce said nothing. Her hand tightened slightly over his on the handset.

Hopper tried breathing again but, his chest felt tight and when he spoke again he ran out of breath as he rushed through the sentence. “Kaihan said I could call her. He tried to get me to while...” Hopper took a ragged breath, “he tried to get me to do it while I was there. So I would have someone there; with me. But, I couldn’t.” Hopper took this moment to shift slightly and meet Joyce’s gaze holding her there with the naked panic in his eyes.

Joyce’s mouth dropped open slightly at the raw honesty she saw there. She had every intention of saying something, something supportive, or poignant, or perfect, but she had nothing.

“She’s our daughter,” Hopper said, “I couldn’t. Not without you,” he finished before turning back to the phone.

Joyce licked her lips and marveled at how dry her throat suddenly was. She’d been allowed to talk to Will, Jonathan, and El since she’d been here but, there’d been a strict no Hopper policy. The cover story had stayed firmly in place and, even though Jonathan knew it was a lie he’d sold it really well to the other two. El knew something was wrong but, Joyce couldn’t tell much other than that. Even after all their months together her daughter still knew how to hide from the world. And, sometimes that still included Joyce. If she was honest with herself, in that moment, Joyce was terrified. She and Hop had been living in a bubble and, now, reality was coming back. Would he still want a woman whose adult son lived with her? Would he want.... Joyce stopped herself from spiraling as she felt Hopper’s left hand flip in place and his fingers lace with hers. He was with her and she with him. Together they could do damn near anything. Hell, together they’d brought him back from the dead. Wasn’t part of coming back from the dead living? It was time they took the reigns and chose to live; whatever that meant. Joyce hoped to God that meant he would choose her children, their daughter, their family.

Joyce glanced at the clock. It was just after four. She tightened her grip on Hopper’s hand. “El should be home from school by now. Jonathan might not be back from work for another hour or so. Do you want to call now before Jonathan gets home or do you want to wait?”

Hopper’s brows drew together slightly. He hadn’t thought of that. “Will would be home with her right?”

Joyce felt herself nodding. “Yeah, they’ll be together. Today is the last day before Christmas break so all the grades let out at the same time.”

Hopper stared unblinking at the phone. “So someone will be with her then.”

“Yeah,” Joyce breathed.

Hopper’s tongue darted out to wet his lower lip, let go of Joyce’s hand, picked up the handset, and used his strongest finger, the pointer finger of his right hand, to punch in the numbers on the keypad. It took a few minutes to get through. The agency switchboard had to get an outside line, then a long distance line, then, finally, a connected ring echoed shrilly over the earpiece of the handset.

She was laughing when she picked up the phone. It was the most amazing sound Hopper had ever heard in his life. Like the tinkling of pearls through a glass chandelier her giggle had an almost ethereal musical quality. Joyce’s heart almost stopped when she saw Hopper’s eyes go wide and watery at the sound. “Yeah...,” El’s voice came across the wire clear as a bell.

“You’re supposed to say ‘Hello’,” Joyce heard Will admonish in the background.

There was a pause. Joyce knew, just by watching his face, that Hopper couldn’t speak.



“Does not matter,” Joyce heard El say back to Will. “No one is there.”

There was a longer pause and, for a moment, Joyce almost grabbed the phone from Hopper until, she realized that El hadn't hung up.

“What are you doing?” Joyce heard Will's voice in the background. There was another long pause and Joyce just watched the scene before her. She could hear El breathing and Will's voice kept getting louder. “El,” Will's voice sounded slightly panicked, “what's wrong? Are you crying?”

El's voice was the next across the handset. “It's him.”

Hopper's breath came out in a ragged exhale.

“I'm sorry Kid,” Hopper's voice cracked. The dam breaking to uneven, gasping, breaths.

“Not sorry,” El's voice sounded wet, weak, and somehow farther away than when the conversation had started. “You came back. Not sorry. Do not be sorry.”

“What in the f word is going on,” Joyce heard Will wail.

There was shuffling on the other side of the phone. “My Dad is back,”

Joyce heard El say to Will.

“I’m telling Jonathan you’re being ... you ... again!” Will’s voice sounded farther away and Joyce heard a sharp sound like a door slamming.

Joyce squeezed Hopper’s forearm to remind him to talk. “I’m sorry I couldn’t do it faster,” Hopper said. “I’m sorry I left at all.”

“You had to,” El responded matter of factly. “But, I found you and they brought you back.”

Joyce’s blood went cold and a glance to Hopper told her he was right there with her. This phone conversation was being monitored. El didn’t know.

“Hey kid,” Hopper’s protective sense seemed to come screaming back with all the grace and delicacy of a freight train. “Tell me what I missed, okay? Tell me about your new school and...,” Hopper grimaced, “cheerleading.”

El chattered incessantly for about twenty minutes after that.

Joyce watched Hopper’s face through the entire conversation as his expressions continued to betray all the emotions parenthood had afforded her without him the past few months. Joy at El’s accomplishments, her six minute mile in gym and placement in honors math, irritation at Michael B., the boy who teased her during

history at her apparent inexperience with social niceties, and exhaustion at her constant stream of ‘friend’ drama. Somewhere nearing half an hour Hopper’s voice seemed to begin to lose some of its’ strength in response and El didn’t miss the change.

“Is Mom there?” Joyce hear El ask.

“Yeah,” Hopper replied. “Yeah she is kid. You want to talk to her?”

“If that’s okay,” El replied. Hopper had already begun to draw the handset away before he heard El’s voice again, small against the change in distance from the speaker. “Dad?” Hopper put the handset back to his head.

“Yeah kid.”

“You will call me back right?”

“Everyday.”

“Good,” El replied. “Dad?”

“Yeah kid.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too kiddo.”

When Hopper relinquished the handset to Joyce the conversation was brief.

“Mom,” El’s voice sounded firm.

“Yeah, baby,” Joyce replied.

“I understand why you did not say. I understand. Not mad.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too Mom.”

“Mom.”

“Yes, baby.”

“Bring him home, okay?”

“I will baby.”

And, with that, the line went silent. There were two clicks. One of El disconnecting and one, Joyce supposed, of the agency’s monitoring service also breaking the connection. Joyce softly placed the handset back in the cradle and took the phone from Hopper’s lap before placing it back on the end table.

For a while they both just stared at their own reflections in the powered off television.

Hopper broke the silence. “This isn’t a trick. We’re going home.”

“That’s the plan,” Joyce spoke toward the TV not daring to look toward Hopper for fear she would lose her tenuous grasp on her emotions.

Suddenly, Hopper’s mouth was on her neck. It happened so quickly Joyce’s breath left her in a rapid gasp followed by a ragged exhale.

“Hopper,” Joyce gasped as her hand instinctively went to wind her fingers through his hair; holding his talented mouth to her flesh.

He hummed against her neck and Joyce knew by the sharp change in pressure that he was leaving a mark in his wake. “Hop, are you okay?” The question came out as a moan in the chilly air of the empty living room. She hated herself for asking it, but she needed to know. It was such an abrupt change in behavior, in tone, she damn

near got whiplash. But, fuck, she didn't want him to stop and, as his left hand came from between their seated forms to cup the juncture of her thighs, her mind almost missed his mumbled words.

"Need you," he murmured into her skin.

Joyce's eyes flashed open and focused on his leg. His body was already trying to turn into her. His leg would be caught between them. Fuck. The way his long middle finger was pushing the seam of her pants against her clit made her almost forget the x-rays, the hospital visits, the pain pills. "Jim wait," Joyce's mind wrestled against her hips as they rocked involuntarily against palm.

But, Joyce had to give him credit. At her words Hopper's hand froze. His mouth came away from her neck and his eyes met hers in an erratic searching pattern.

Joyce gave a small smile. "You have me; stupid. For as long as you want. But, you said something about being creative a while ago and I think that means both of us. After all, it's no good if you just keep breaking yourself."

Hopper watched in awe as Joyce slid off the couch. Her tiny form slipped under his propped leg and he shuddered involuntarily as her soft, warm, palms drifted up the thin cotton material of the pants covering his inner thighs. The soft curves of her shoulders pushed his thighs slightly further apart as she came up, her knees on the floor, her elbows on the lip of the couch before him and her head and chest between his legs.

“Joyce,” Hopper croaked her name before swallowing thickly.

Joyce paused. Her eyes on his face. His eyes were closed, breath uneven, chin up toward the ceiling, and his bottom lip worried between his front teeth. “Jim,” she said; more to get his attention than anything.

His eyes opened and he looked down at her, perched between his legs. Joyce saw uncertainty there and it broke her damn heart. She still knew very little about what he’d been through. He made vague references to it ‘being bad’ or ‘unimaginable.’ Hopper had even told her a few of his dreams. Running in the dark, the depths of the other place closing in on him, but he’d never really told her how he’d come to be in a black ops Russian detention center where the best and brightest of the US counter intelligence community had found him. She knew, at least in part, what he’d endured because the medical records that she’d been given showed that, with the exception of some of the scarring and lacerations, all the significant damage done to his body had been inflicted by those now long dead Russian captors. Just by watching his behaviors she knew it had been bad. The bruising on her throat had easily, told her that much. She knew they’d taken his clothes. He’d never confirmed it verbally; his reactions to her touch told her as much. Jim Hopper had been a cocky bastard for as long as she’d known him; over half her life. He’d never much cared what others thought of him, physically. When his tummy had gone from washboard toward a little more beer keg he could still be found, most Saturdays, barbecuing in his front lawn, shirtless, with the top button of his jeans undone to allow what he called ‘room for expansion.’ Even after he donned the badge it hadn’t been above him not to wear much else in an effort to raise eyebrows while he demonstrated his prowess running the full length of the high school football field during half time. The one time an off duty patrol coworker had tackled him it was reported Hopper had boasted, ‘you never would’ve gotten me if I hadn’t stopped.’ That was Hopper before Sara. Hopper after Sara was different; but similar. Still shirtless whenever possible he saved his nude-r exploits for one on one activities behind closed doors. He’d fucked his way through half

the town of Hawkins after Sara. But, that had been before; before Will, before El, before his trip to the 'other place,' and before Russia.

They'd been so close these last few weeks. The kisses were nice. Who the fuck was she kidding the kisses were wonderful. Hopper knew how to use his mouth; so much so that Joyce had snuck away to the bathroom on more than one occasion to bring herself off to the idea of him, with that mouth, between her legs. It had been a week ago; the first time he'd come from the shower, through the bathroom door, without his shirt. Using his crutches he'd found his to the couch where, contentedly, Joyce has curled next to him and, with her eyes closed, let her fingers play through his expanse of sandy brown chest hair. Later Joyce would blame her lack of realization on the fact that her eyes had been closed. The panic attack had lasted less than ninety seconds and cost their temporary home a broken lamp. He wouldn't say why, but when he returned again from the bathroom he'd been wearing a soft blue v neck sweater. They didn't talk about it. Maybe they should have.

His hands were amazing as well, if Joyce was still being honest. She'd almost come so many times under his talented fingers dancing against her covered mound and, while he seemed to have no qualms about getting her naked for him, Joyce supposed that she'd been the one to put a stop to that angle. She needed to feel him. His skin on hers. His heat on her. His heat in her. She needed to feel him to get off with him and he wasn't there; yet. Until he was she was fine waiting, watching, bearing witness to his rebuilding confidence. Leaving his clothes in place like his own personal suit of armor.

But, he had started this; again. And, here, between his legs Joyce was careful with the heady rush of power she felt watching his chest convulse just at the feeling of her palms on his covered thighs. So she followed his name with a question; the most honest thing she could think to tell him, to ask him, in that moment. "I want to touch you, underneath," Joyce gathered some of the loose, thin, cotton



sweatpants in her hand to show her meaning, “may I?”

As Joyce watched Hopper winced. An expression of a kind of pain for which there was no pill. Hopper’s head gave a jerky nod and, as he watched, with eyes open, Joyce leaned in and laid her head at the juncture of his thighs, against the hard ridge that had formed there. Hopper jerked at the contact and his hands instinctively grabbed at hers on the tops of his thighs. Joyce heard him gasp, no doubt from the sudden contraction of the, still sore, fingers of his right hand around her left. Joyce cast her eyes up to meet his and held his gaze while she mouthed the ridge by her cheek.

“Lord Jesus Fucking fuck,” Hopper somehow enunciated every word on one gasping inhale.

Her lower lip still slightly curled against the material of Hopper’s pants Joyce only moved her mouth enough to speak. “Do you want me to stop?”

“Please God no. Don’t stop.” Hopper’s voice came out barely above a whisper and the corner’s of Joyce’s mouth tugged at the beginnings of a smirk.

Joyce pulled her hands from under his and let them drift up to Hopper’s waistband. Her fingers found the edges and Hopper’s hips gave a tiny, involuntary, thrust as she rubbed the pads of her thumbs under the elastic. “Is this okay?” She murmured the question against the material. In response Hopper lifted his hips, slightly, and Joyce began to roll the material down.

“Don’t stop,” she heard him murmur again. “Please.”

To Joyce it seemed like it took an eternity. In reality she had his boxers and cotton sweatpants down to his knees within ten seconds. Goddamn. Joyce had some idea of Hopper’s size but, Goddamn. To say he was proportional would be an understatement. Joyce held Hop’s gaze, “Tell me if you need to stop.”

Hopper gave a curt nod and Joyce kept their eyes locked as she used the tip of her tongue to chase the line of the vein on the underside of Jim Hopper’s cock.

The whine that escaped Hopper’s lips when Joyce finally took him in her mouth gave Joyce only a moment's pause. As she set a steady rhythm with her left hand banded around the base she couldn’t force down her throat she felt Hopper’s left hand come to the back of her skull; his fingers combing lightly through her hair.

“Fuck, Joyce,” he choked out, “I need to know.”

Joyce pulled off with a wet pop and kept working her left hand on his shaft as she moved the right to her own pants. Hopper gasped as he watched her put her hand inside the waistband to cup her own sex; the graphically obvious movements under the fabric doing nothing to hide her intent. “Need to know what?”

“Hair fucking trigger Babe,” he gasped when she used her thumb to circle the slit at the head of his cock. “Need to know where you want me to come.”

Joyce moaned at the obscene reality of her current situation rubbing her own fingertips against her clit a little harder. "Want you to come wherever you need," Joyce murmured. "But, if you're asking I'd prefer inside me."

Hopper groaned at her words but, despite his obvious arousal Joyce felt his body tense. He wasn't ready for that; not yet.

Not willing to let anything go sideways when she felt this good Joyce quickly added, "Come in my mouth. Please. Want to taste you."

Hopper's hips bucked despite his best efforts for control when Joyce took him back in her mouth. "Fuck Baby are you sure?" Hopper groaned. When she didn't answer Hopper was left to only feel the heat of mouth and listen as obscenely wet sounds filled the room.

Joyce didn't stop to answer, she couldn't, she was so fucking close. She could feel his body trembling under her lips. Her own right hand moved faster, in tight circles, as she elected, instead, to double her attentions on Hopper. Her hand went from the base of Hopper's cock to roll his balls softly. At this action Hopper's hand on the back of her head went rigid and Joyce felt his balls contract.

"Jesus. Fuck. Joyce I'm gonna," Hopper gasped. There was a violence to it as his hips came off the couch, but Joyce could feel, in the way his clipped short nails scrabbled against her scalp, him holding onto sanity. He wasn't giving over to the fear. He was there, with her, staying with her, even as his orgasm washed through him.

Joyce moaned and felt her own tiny orgasm crest at the taste of his release flooding her tongue. She'd never really liked the taste of ejaculate but, something about this time made it different. It was her signal, her reward, that she had done this, they had done this; gotten him this far. Past one more barrier, one more stumbling block, past one more nightmare, one more memory; they made it together.

Joyce sucked him through it. Her tongue swirling the glans as she felt the throbbing cease and, just as she felt him begin to pull away, she pulled her show stopping blow job trick and swallowed around his flaccid cock; the action pulling the over sensitive member down her throat. Lonnie had always loved it; apparently Jim was a little different.

Hopper choked and pulled back on her hair gently. "Too much," he gasped as Joyce came away from him; using a fingertip to wipe the corner of her mouth.

"Noted for next time," Joyce whispered with a smirk.

Joyce looked up under hooded lids and met Hopper's gaze. What she saw there made her inner muscles contract again. Hopper's stare could only be described as; hungry. Joyce went still. She wasn't afraid but, for all the world, she suddenly felt like a very very small prey animal. Pants still halfway down his thighs, seeming unconcerned about his now flaccid cock, Hopper leaned forward and reached out his left hand. Joyce shuddered, preparing for him to caress her face, her hair, or, God please, touch her breast. Instead Hopper's left hand fingers curled lightly around her right elbow. Joyce looked down to discover that her right palm was still in the front of her pants. She felt pressure on her elbow and, so achingly slowly, Joyce let Hopper draw her hand from her pants and wrap his fingers around her wrist.

Hopper's mouth hung open and he panted lightly in the stillness of the cool December afternoon. Her fingers were wet. Joyce, his Joyce, had just gotten off with his cock in her mouth. He needed to know.

Joyce bit her lower lip as she felt Hop's hand tighten around her wrist. The pressure was nowhere near pain but it was close enough to uncomfortable that it made Joyce's heart thump hard against her ribs. It wasn't the strength of the Hopper before. However, the power, just in his left hand, was enough to whisper the memory of the man she remembered. A man possessed by naked need to fulfill what he desired; booze, food.... Sex.

Joyce gave an involuntary squeak as Hopper pulled her up between his legs, drew her hand to his mouth and slipped her fingers into his mouth.

"Jesus Christ. Joyce," Hopper groaned.

Joyce was perched on Hop's right leg, leaning into his chest, with her head and cheek tucked against his shoulder. She watched as her fingers went back between his lips for a second time and felt his tongue circle the digits one by one. She gasped lightly when the pressure increased and he sucked lightly.

"You're so fucking sweet Joyce; so goddamned sweet." Hopper's scruff tickled the skin of her neck as his words danced across the exposed flesh.

Joyce shuddered against him.

Hopper's lips found the lobe of her right ear. "Let me taste you," he whispered.

## 7. Dining in and Eating out (yes I went there)

\*\*\*\*\*DISCLAIMER\*\*\*\*\*

I own nothing. I'm sorry this is so delayed!

\*\*\*\*\*WARNING\*\*\*\*\*

This is pure pornography. Please turn back now if this is not your thing.

Sorry-Not Sorry! ;)

“Please,” Joyce moaned.

She felt him against her, moving her, to slide through his legs again and stand between them. Joyce felt weak in the knees just standing there for a moment. She watched as he worked his own sweatpants back over his member and up his hips. Hop got his crutches and stood looking around the room before settling on the breakfast bar that separated the kitchen from the small dining room. Hope smirked at her, “remember sitting on the counters as Jimmy’s Diner after class? It’ll make you just about the right height.”

Joyce’s tongue darted out to wet her bottom lip and she scampered across the living room. Before she got the breakfast bar she hauled a dining room chair to sit in front of the counter. Hopper smiled as he watched her jump onto the bar and swing her legs back and forth. She looked just like the high school girl he remembered. Her face seemed lighter than he’d seen in years and, despite being forty plus and spent to the point of exhaustion, Hopper surprised himself when he felt his cock twitch in his pants.

Hopper swung himself on crutches to the other side of the room and dropped into the dining room chair. He chewed on the corner of his lower lip, momentarily, before leaning forward and catching one of Joyce’s ankles with his left hand. His expression was intense as he

slid off her right shoe and sock first followed, in short order, by her left. Joyce leaned back and braced herself on the formica to compensate for the loss of her legs as counterbalance. Hopper's fingers lingered on the soft skin of Joyce's left foot. He braced the outside against his taped right hand and sunk the thumbs of both hands into soft flesh of the sole.

Joyce let out an obscene groan and, losing her balance on countertop, and flopped onto her back on the surface in a manner that could never be interpreted as graceful or sexy in the least. When he started to move firm fingers to slowly rotate her heel Joyce flopped an arm over her eyes and groaned again, "Jesus Hop." Her panting increased slightly when his thumbs slowly circled the bones of her ankle; the pressure divine. Lonnie never, Bob wasn't this good at this, she had nev...."Gah," Joyce exclaimed as Hopper suddenly banded his left hand around her slight ankle and, abruptly, pulled forward.

Swallowing thickly Joyce craned her neck to look up, eyeing Hopper with mock irritation. What she saw made breath tense and, for the second time in twenty minutes, she went very still. Her foot was much closer to Hopper's face than she'd realized and, meeting her eyes, Hopper brought her appendage to his mouth, kissing the top before baring teeth and grazing the skin there. He looked back to her, briefly, before bracing the sole of her left foot against his chest and moving his attentions to her right. Joyce weighed her options. This was amazing. It looked for all the world like Jim Hopper was preparing to worship her body starting at the toes and working his way up. However, just because she had twenty years of sexual desire pent up when it came to Hop, she wondered if it would be bad form to check in and make sure he was planning on making his way north tonight or if 'Let me taste you' only pertained to her feet.

"Hop," Joyce choked on the name; the roughness in her voice startling even herself.

Hopper didn't answer by way of words but, when Joyce looked back down the length of her body she saw that he was leisurely rotating her ankle and looking back with his eyebrows raised; a soft smirk on his face.

Joyce croaked another unrecognizable sound as she let her body



relax back onto the counter. She focused on her breathing before speaking again. "Hop, fuck this is amazing, but, you don't have to rub my feet. In fact, I was kinda hoping you wanted me on this counter for something else."

Joyce was looking at the ceiling, not Hopper's face, so she couldn't see his expression but, because her foot was still firmly against his chest, she could feel the soft vibrations of rumbling laughter that rippled through him. He spoke so softly she almost missed it.

"Need you relaxed," Hopper whispered against Joyce's right foot.

Joyce shuddered as she felt his tongue dart out against the inside of her ankle.

"Hopper, you don't," Joyce squeaked when Hop finished up with her right ankle the same way he had with her left; a sharp pull that, now, left three quarters of her ass hanging off the counter.

Hopper moved the foot from his chest to rest the ankle over his shoulder and she heard a scrape of chair legs on the floor before her right ankle came to rest on his left shoulder. "Oh but I do," Hopper rumbled. She felt large palms spread over her tensing abdomen before fingers clutched at her waistband and she felt her whole body start to tremble. "Shhhh," Hopper hushed as he laid his cheek against her inner thigh. "I've got you."

James Hopper was in heaven. For the first time in months, maybe years, he felt like a fucking man again. Joyce freaking Byers...wait, no, Horowitz, was laid out before him like a three course meal. Every time she drew breath he watched as the muscles of her abdomen quivered and the way her fingers kept grasping at her own clothes while he rubbed her feet was making him smirk in self satisfaction. He still had it.

With Joyce's ankles over his shoulders Hop leaned forward and put his cheek against her inner thigh; inhaling her sweetly musky scent. As he slid his hands to her waistband he felt her thighs start to shake against his cheek. She'd been right there with him through everything so, he said the one thing he could think of; 'I've got you.' In that moment; it was his turn. His turn to be there for her. She

needed this, she deserved this, and, by God, even if it took the rest of his life, he would repay her for everything she had done for him. One earth shattering orgasm at a time. He may have been a shit husband, an average cop, and above par father but, this, this was one thing he knew he could do.

Joyce felt the whisper of her pants being pulled from the flair of her hips. When had he undone the button? Hop was taking her underwear at the same time and a sudden flush of heat crept into her cheeks as she fought the urge to try and sit up, clutch at her clothes, or reach out to Hopper. The way Hop had her situated she had no control. She couldn't reach him to touch him, she couldn't regain her balance to sit up because so much of her was hanging off the counter, and she had no counter balance with her legs over his shoulders. Joyce chewed her bottom lip as she relished the fact that she was at his mercy.

Hopper worked the slacks down her legs pulling her left foot out first followed by her right before dropping the pants and underwear to the floor. He smirked to himself as he saw her fingers scrabble against her soft belly. She was nervous. When his eyes refocused on her center it was his turn for his breath to turn ragged.

"Goddamn," Hopper swallowed thickly around the curse.

Joyce felt her cheeks flame again as she brought both palms up to cover her face. She snuck a quick peek down the length of her body and, momentarily, saw hungry eyes meet hers before they refocused on the pulsing need between her legs. Then, without any pretense, Jim Hopper kissed her; there.

Joyce's back bowed violently and she felt strong hands anchor her hips as she gasped in a sharp intake of breath. She couldn't breath, or maybe she needed to exhale, she forgot. Her world was focused to a pinpoint of sensation between her legs. Joyce felt his open mouth caress her folds as his tongue probed deeper. He pulled back for a moment and Joyce tried to inhale, she really did, but her chest wasn't doing what it was told. She felt Hopper's hands slide from her hips under her ass and he was lifting her, holding her, to his mouth and, then his mouth was back on her. His scruff abrading her delicate flesh only seemed to make it more sensitive and Joyce screamed to

the echoing empty room when she felt him capture her throbbing clit between his tongue and top teeth.

Hop heard Joyce keen as he rolled her clit against the smooth outside of his top teeth. He released the nub briefly before recapturing it between firm lips and sucking lightly. Fuck, he needed to have his hands on her to do this right. He needed his thumb; his fingers. He could feel the soft pulsing of her entrance and knew that she was empty inside. He needed to give her something to grip.

Joyce heard the dining room chair scrape against the floor again and gasped as she felt her pelvis being tilted. Hopper had temporarily released her sex and was releasing small pants of air against her as he readjusted her to balance smoothly against his chest with his left arm bearing most of her weight. Her ass was almost level with his collarbone now and she could feel every breath he exhaled.

“Hop,” Joyce started, worried momentarily that he’d winded himself or the exertion was too much, “you don’t have tahhhhh..”

Joyce didn’t get a chance to finish the sentence as Hopper used the opportunity to snake his right hand up from below and smoothly slide his ring finger inside of her. Joyce’s mind went blank. His hands were massive; fingers thick and long. Her mind gripped at the memory of Hop’s cock in her mouth as she felt her wet running down onto his hand.

Hopper didn’t know how he was going to make it through this himself. He was hard; again. He was a man in his forties, with a shit diet, bad habits out the ass, who just spent time in two kinds of hell and, yet, his cock was rock hard and jutting painfully against the suddenly sandpapery feeling of the pants he wore. Fuck, he knew she was tight. Obviously. She was tiny by comparison to his size. But, he’d thought, she’d had kids. Surely. She’d been married, dating, there was no reason to think.... Hop sucked harder at her clit to hide a grimace at the feeling of his cock bobbing in time with his pulse. He barely had one finger inside of her and she was baring down on him like a fucking velvet vice. Hop thrust his finger in time to slight variations in sucking and tapping at her clit with his tongue. He could feel the rhythmic pulsing inside of her. He knew he’d have to do this often before they could do anything else. The thought of

hurting her, the very idea, was out of the question.

“Hop,” Joyce whined.

Hopper’s eyes darted up to see that her hands had gone to her own breasts; plucking at the nipples through her shirt. He groaned against her flesh.

“Hop,” Joyce called out again, “I’m so close. Please. Just; please. Just a little more. Just one more. I’m almost there.”

Hop didn’t realize he’d been shaking his head until he pulled his mouth away. “I won’t hurt you,” he breathed against her.

“God,” Joyce practically shouted as her hips bucked against his mouth. “You won’t fucking hurt me Hop, please.”

Groaning against her, Hop removed his ring finger three quarters of the way before slipping the tip of his middle finger back and forth along her clit before pushing it in alongside the first.

It took two thrusts and Joyce was screaming. Hopper stayed with her, his mouth on her, through the entire orgasm, working her through it with short firm strokes against her clit. Hopper didn’t know how, exactly to disentangle them from their current position so, when he felt her body go limp, slipped his fingers from her before cleaning her with his mouth. Afterward he nudged her legs a little wider and let them slip around his shoulders as he gently lifted her body off the counter and brought her to rest, in his lap, against his chest, her legs straddling his lap her chest pressed to his. As their breathing collectively evened Hopper stroked Joyce’s hair and whispered hushed words that Joyce wouldn’t remember the next day. Her bliss always made her hazy post orgasm. As she came back to reality Joyce noted the erection rubbing through Hop’s pants against her inner thigh.

Joyce looked up and Hopper met her gaze evenly; he shook his head. “Just sleep for now,” he murmured. She took him at his word and curled into his chest; fingers playing lightly across the exposed skin at the gap near the collar of his shirt.

## **8. \*Author's Note\***

### **Summary for the Chapter:**

This is a short story in itself. I've had a year; haven't we all. 2020 was a bitch and 2021 didn't start to stack up much better. To be absolutely clear I'm not looking for sympathy. If anything this was more cathartic for me to write. I have a strong belief that story telling should be honest. So here goes.... please stay tuned for chapter 9 (the end to this actual story) up in an hour or so!

Until then....

One upon a time there was a girl. She had a pretty alright life. She was married to a boy that loved her, had a decent job, got paid to write short mystery stories in her spare time, and had two children she was lucky enough to adopt. Her children were wonderful and on track to be totally alright people as well.

The girl was okay. Happy, even, sometimes.

Then life got in the way.

Once upon a time there was a woman who discovered her son was a drug addict. She knew about the marijuana. The experimentation. But, he was really good at hiding it and he was a kid; right? That's what kids do. They make questionable decisions and hide them from their parents. They think they're slick. The woman didn't know about the other stuff though. She didn't know about the pills, the booze, or pipes for different drugs. She didn't know because he was an 'A' student and ran on the track team. She didn't know because he was the captain of the cross country team and did volunteer work. She didn't know because he had a girlfriend and was looking at colleges. She didn't know until she did. So the woman tightened her belt and tried to get her son help. She was in his business and searched his room. She got him a therapist and worked with doctors to try to help him get clean. The woman and her son fought constantly, and the son ran away and the woman blamed herself. She was tired. The woman

was so very tired.

Once upon a time there was a tired woman whose daughter had a psychotic break with reality. The woman blamed herself. Her son had run away from home and broken back into their house to steal from them. The woman thought that her daughter was just depressed and scared like the rest of the family. The woman took her daughter to a doctor because her daughter kept talking about being followed and seeing things that weren't there. The woman and her husband looked ashamed when the specialist asked about medical history. 'Closed adoption,' the woman's husband tried to explain. The tired woman tried to explain how much she'd tried. They'd hired a PI to look into it, to try to get some medical background but, they still knew so very little. The specialist looked at the tired woman with pity.

'Schizophrenia usually manifests in the late teens and early twenties. This is a text book presentation.'

The tired woman knew this was, somehow, her fault and she hated the specialist for the look of pity. The tired woman knew her husband blamed her, even though he swore he didn't. Then the pills came, so many pills, and the tired woman's daughter slept all the time but, the woman didn't sleep. She watched her daughter fight imaginary demons, gain so much weight, and sleep; for sixteen to twenty hours a day. The tired woman missed her son and her daughter. The tired woman started sleeping, when she could, in the recliner in the living room. She quit talking to her husband over her lunch break. The woman was tired, so tired, and angry.

Once upon a time there was a tired angry woman whose mother fell in the backyard. Her mother didn't even step in a hole. She was just walking and, just like that, she fell to the ground. The tired angry woman forced her way into the ER during the COVID-19 pandemic and stayed by her mother's side. Security came. The doctors came. Her mother's femurs were shattered. Both of them. Shattered. 'Your mother has late stage osteoporosis; some of the worst I've ever seen. I'm shocked she hasn't broken anything before now.' The tired angry woman listened as the doctor told her that her mother's legs didn't break when she fell, they broke while she was walking and that's what caused her to fall. Walking. The tired, angry woman stayed with her mother every waking minute when she wasn't with her daughter.

Twelve weeks of rehabilitation and six surgeries. The tired angry woman took a sabbatical from work and her husband started working late and on weekends; he admitted he didn't want to come home anymore until their daughter was asleep. The woman was so very very tired, angry, and sad. So very sad.

The tired angry sad woman got a knife out of the kitchen block. She sat on the floor of the kitchen the day after Christmas with her knife. Her children couldn't come to Christmas. Her son wasn't speaking to her when he was sober, which wasn't very often, and her daughter had turned violent. Her mother was in so much pain still from the last surgery. So much pain. The tired angry sad woman could barely stand to be in the room with her mother. Even though her mother did her best to hide her pain it overwhelmed the woman. These things happen. She kept telling herself; these are things that happen. People are drug addicts. People have schizophrenia. People get old and develop osteoporosis. The knife was so shiny she could see her reflection in the blade. She didn't think her husband would have an affair but, at this point she wouldn't blame him if he did. She'd fought a good fight and lost. She missed her son. She missed her daughter. She missed her husband. She missed herself.

The phone rang.

The tired angry sad woman jumped just a little and the knife jolted off her lap and onto the kitchen floor.

The phone continued to ring.

The tired angry sad woman got up and answered. 'Babe,' the woman's husband said. The woman looked at the clock and realized that it was early for her husband to be calling.

'Yeah?'

'Was thinking about you. Was thinking about,' he sighed, 'everything.'

'Yeah?'

In the pause that followed the tired angry sad woman could feel

herself growing older. She could feel the last slips of will sliding from her body.

‘I need to know what I can do to help. I don’t know what to do. I’m afraid. I don’t want to lose you too.’

Breathing. The woman could breathe again. She started to cry.

Five months later the woman sits in her therapist's office. They talk about how she is still tired. She is still angry; sometimes. They talk about how she is still sad, and that’s okay. They talk about her son. They talk about plans for her daughter, vacations, and the future. They talk like there is a future. Because, there is.

They talk. And, they keep talking.

Today they talk about self care. The therapist says she wants to know what the woman used to do to ‘blow off steam.’ She asks about that one activity that used to get out all the woman’s anxiety and frustrations.

The woman has a sudden flashback to her life before all the madness and she covers her face and blushes so hard her ears turn red.

‘What?’ The therapist sits forward in her chair realizing she hit a nerve.

‘I used to write.’

‘Mystery novellas; right? You told me that. You did alright for yourself; right?’

‘I used to write other stuff too. Stuff for just me and some internet peeps.’

‘Like what?’

The woman blushes again.

‘Erotica.’ The woman grimaces for the inevitable judgement but the therapist lets out a bark of laughter and claps her hands together.



‘You?’

The woman nods her head. ‘Mostly fan fiction but, some original stuff too. I actually left a story unfinished when all this started.’

The therapist starts clapping and smiling, delighted with herself. ‘I want you to finish it.’

‘You what?’

‘I want you to finish it. It’s homework. It will be good for you. And, if you’re okay with it, I would love to read it!’

So the woman wrote. She wrote the ending to her old story. It wasn’t perfect but, it was an ending.

Then the woman kept writing because she had more stories to tell.

## 9. Sex after 40

### Summary for the Chapter:

\*Normal Disclaimer\* I do not or profit in any way from my fan fiction. These are not my characters....just my therapy. I truly hope you enjoy. This has not been beta'd, it should have been, but, honestly I haven't put anything out in so long I just wanted to get this done and up. So we die on the hill of our grammatical mistakes! Hopefully, if you find some, it doesn't detract from the story too much!

\*The following chapter contains graphic depictions of sexual acts. If this is not your thing please turn back now!\*

General FYI - Sex after 40 can be a different kind of animal. With that in mind this will be a different type of scene from my usual writing. I hope you enjoy.

Love to all and, until next time, cheers and happy writing!

Rev

Hopper was pacing in the living room. He felt the panic attack coming. He'd come to recognize the way they bent the edges of his vision, clouded his mind, pulling a racing stream of consciousness thought patterns faster and faster until he lost control.

Two days.

That was all they had left.

Two days and their precious bubble of seclusion would be over.

Not that he minded. Hopper wanted to get back to his daughter, his cabin, even though Joyce had informed him most of it was destroyed, and his life. But, this, whatever this magical thing that had happened

between him and Joyce, seemed so fragile and, yet, so unbreakable he just wanted a little bit longer to figure it out. Even though Christmas, January, and a week and a half of February had tripped by and Hopper just wanted a few more hours, a few more days; just a little bit longer.

Kaihan had told him that this was part of it; the PTSD. He'd explained that Hopper would have increasing anxiety the closer the date came but that it was time. Joyce and Hopper had started going into 'sessions' together with Kaihan last month; shortly after the brace had come off his leg. Hopper had a cane now. He hated it. It seemed to be a fixture of his new life along with other things he hated; nightmares, sedatives, prescribed stretches, and, worst of all, separate beds. The risk was still too high. He'd woken all three times they'd tried to find her on the floor or standing next to the bed. She didn't ever blame him; God he wished she would. The third time she'd skinned her elbow on the floor scrambling away and he'd called it. She'd stamped her little feet, her face all scrunched up, and told him she was tougher than he thought. He didn't disagree. No woman out there was tougher. Didn't change the fact that he was two and half times her weight, even trimmed down. It wasn't safe, no matter how much they wanted to believe it could be. Believing something only gets you so far before reality gets in the way. Maybe someday but not today.

Hopper paused looking out the small kitchen window that allowed a view over the driveway. Joyce still wasn't back. He scrubbed his hands over his face. What the fuck was he doing? It didn't matter how many things about his new existence he hated. He had a new existence. He had a new existence with her. Hopper stopped at the breakfast bar and his palms reflexively gripped the edge and released over and over until his breath slowed to match the movement. He closed his eyes, listening to his rasping shallow breathing, forcing himself to breath deeper and, just for a moment, he heard a soft feminine moan.

Hopper's eyes flew open, heart racing. He scanned the room. He was still alone. Hopper forced a deep breath into his lungs; pulling the air in through his nose and mouth. Closing his eyes again he let his mind wander back to the moment it sought. There on this breakfast bar.

Even in her absence he could smell her generic soap and baby powder soft scent that was distinctly her. He let his memory pull him back to that moan. He could almost see her behind his lids like she was laid out in front of him now. Soft creamy skin covered in a fine sheet of perspiration. Tummy trembling under his hands and her scent, even just the memory of it, making him hard. Pulling him back to the good of it all, the now, to reality.

‘Use anything you can to ground you in reality,’ Kaihan had said to him. ‘You have the love of a partner, an equal, a child that misses you, and you have been of great service to your country. Go back to them. If you can’t think of any other reason, look there, and know you are needed.’

Hopper huffed out an exhale and opened his eyes. He forced his hands to unclench from around the edge of the breakfast bar. Taking stock of his slowing heart rate Hopper finally felt himself coming down. “Get it together,” he grumbled to the empty house. He cast his eyes back to the kitchen window at the sound of crunching gravel outside and looked up in time to see Joyce emerging from a government car with two shopping bags. She bent at the waist, giving Hopper a pleasant view of her perfect ass, before saying something to the driver, turning with her bags, and heading to the house.

Hopper cast a downward glance at his obvious erection.

“Down boy,” he mumbled as he went to open the door for Joyce.

Joyce was having a pleasantly productive morning. She’d woken early to Hop battling long dead demons in the next room. True to their agreement she’d stood at the door and called his name until he woke up; hair wild and covered in sweat. She used to pity him but, after a dozen or so mornings, she found it only seemed to anger him further. After speaking with Kaihan, now, she recognized this new routine for what it was; just a thing that is until it isn’t. Not a pitiable action on his part but, another recovering part of his person. And, just like his leg, it would take as long as it takes.

Once Hopper was in the shower she’d made a quick breakfast and called a car. She wouldn’t have valets and a credit card with a mystery limit for much longer. The last she’d been in the small town

near the farm she'd noted some Levi's in the men's goods section at the hardware store that she felt would be flattering to Hop's ass. The fact that some shadowy government agency would be paying for them just made them more appealing.

A little less than four hours later Joyce was ridiculously hungry; particularly after such a large breakfast. The hamburger place with chocolate malts near the edge of town called her name so, before leaving, she ordered two number fours with everything and fries, a chocolate malt for herself, and strawberry for Hop. So, having made breakfast, been shopping (where she toted home more than one pair of jeans), foraging for lunch, and making it back home again by a little after noon made for a pretty good morning if she did say so herself. And, it was with that thought that she carefully picked her way across the gravel of the drive and looked up to see Hopper standing in the open door; a bashful smile on his face as they made eye contact. Goddamn she loved that man.

Christian, the driver, helped Joyce inside while balancing the food boxes on one hand and depositing them on the table.

"Smells like you cooked," Hopper growled snagging Joyce's right forearm with his right hand and pulling him flush to his front. This action served two purposes. One, it gave Hop the ability to bury his nose in the top and side of Joyce's head. He could inhale her scent as he held his petite frame to his larger one. It made him feel...good... powerful....in control... and, he'd made sure Joyce enjoyed this too; to be held like this. Because if she didn't, what was the point? The second thing pulling her tiny back to his front accomplished was to provide a barrier that blocked Christian from noting Jim Hopper's sizable and growing erection. Bonus; It also gave Hopper the opportunity to grind himself against Joyce's full backside. This action brought forth a tiny gasp from Joyce that did absolutely nothing to deflate the side of Hopper's erection.

Hopper looked up to find Christian on the other side of the breakfast bar putting the malts in the freezer. When he turned again Hopper caught his eye and was surprised to find a melancholy touch around his expression. Christian spoke, "I'm so happy for you guys," he cleared his throat, "really."

Joyce giggled and, for all the world, Hop thought she sounded sixteen again. Her voice was light and Hopper knew that whatever he had seen in Christian's eyes she had missed. "Well I'd invited you to stay for lunch but, it's time to feed the bears," Joyce turned on her heel and gave Hop a playful slap on the pec before crossing the space and coming to direct Christian to the door. "You know when a bear eats, it's nothing fit for an audience," she laughed at her own joke as she walked.

Christian walked with her to the door and, when Hopper turned away from them to readjust himself, Christian took the moment to throw his arms around Joyce's neck and pull her into a brief and startling hug. She was caught off balance and tipped into his chest slightly so, when his lips found the shell of her ear his whisper was so close she could feel the dampness of his breath. "It didn't turn out so well for the other seven. Don't look back." Joyce steadied herself on Christian's shoulders. Her knees felt a little weak and her eyes wouldn't focus. Christian's voice returned to a normal volume. "You guys are great together. I'm so glad we, at the agency, could help with everything. You have a great chance to move on from this. Don't look back. I'm off tomorrow and Sunday so I won't be around to tell you goodbye proper but, it's been great getting to know you folks."

Joyce was still staring at the door after Christian had closed it behind him. Her mouth opened and closed like a fish while she was doing her best to process what Christian had just told her. Seven; he said the 'other seven.'

Joyce jumped a bit when she felt Hopper come back up behind her. "The food is getting cold darlin," his gravel voice sent shivers down her spine and Joyce's hand came around behind her to grip his thigh.

'Don't look back,' that's what Christian had said. Joyce's mind was racing and, as she closed her eyes and leaned back into Hopper's solid frame, she felt her thoughts slow. 'Don't look back.' Joyce brought her other hand back to rest on Hopper's hip behind her exhaled slowly as she ground her ass back into Hopper's form. She could feel his erection pressing into her back and she smiled.

"I'm not hungry anymore," Joyce ground out as she heard Hopper's breath catch. "Not for burgers anyway," when she turned the smirk

on her face made Hop's mouth drop open.

They hadn't.

Not that they didn't want to.

They just hadn't; not yet.

Hopper's brain stuttered and froze. If Joyce had a come hither look, this was it. They'd gone so far. Hands and tongue; he'd had his mouth over almost every square inch of her body and she'd, well, if his aching cock wasn't a testament to his enjoyment of her skills he didn't know what was. But, despite scissoring her open on multiple occasions, despite the countless hours he'd spent with his face snugly between her thighs, his fear was prevalent that he would hurt her. He was, not a small man, and she was such a little thing.

"What exactly are you hungry for?" Hopper growled, pulling her flush to his front.

"Well," Joyce wriggled out of Hop's grasp and backed toward the king sized bedroom he had come to call his own, "I was thinking..."

"Dangerous," Hopper said with a smirk.

"We're going home in two days," Joyce said softly, "and we won't exactly have this kind of privacy."

"Yeah," Hopper responded as he rounded the doorframe, still following her into his bedroom.

"And, I'd like to take that last step with you while we still have a place to ourselves," Joyce finished as she, effortlessly, pulled her top over her head leaving Hopper to take gape at her stunningly gorgeous cleavage held aloft in a simple cream colored cotton bra.

"Joyce," Hopper started hesitantly.

Joyce heard the tremor in his voice; the concern. "Jim," she said with an upward inflection.

"Joyce, just," Hopper's breath was a touch ragged, "you're sure?"

Joyce moved to sit on the bed and tilted her head. "Jim, I want you. I want you in every way possible. But, I only want this if you want this. If you don't want it we can wait; as long as you need."

Hopper sighed and scrubbed his hand through thinning brown hair. "I'll hurt you," he breathed. "I hurt everything I touch."

Joyce's features creased with annoyance and confusion. "Nine and a half weeks we've been together in this place. Nine and a half weeks and you've not hurt me. Twenty-five years I've known you Hoop and I've put you through the wringer; you've never hurt me. Don't do this now. If you don't want to take this last step with me yet that's fine; we can wait but, don't hide behind not hurting me."

"Joyce, your neck," Hopper started.

"Jim, no," Joyce stood up exasperated, throwing her hands in the air. Turning she pointed her finger at Hopper's chest, "no, you don't get to do that. You're not asleep, you're awake. We're here together; awake. You'd never hurt me now. And," Joyce stopped and stomped her foot, "I hate to bust your bubble buster but, you may be big but, you ain't fucking King Kong over there."

Hopper lurched forward the two steps between them. His eyes focused on her flaring nostrils and heaving breasts. She was pissed. His girl was pissed. He should be defending his decision, standing his ground, explaining to her that if he ever consciously hurt her it would be the last moment of his life as he would eat a bullet before he would allow himself to live after causing her any pain. He would tell her these things, he should, if he could. But, as he found himself pressed against her heaving chest he couldn't tell her anything; he couldn't speak. Jim Hopper was too fucking turned on. Slowly, in a trance like state, he brought his right hand up to her face and traced his pointer finger down her nose. As he watched her nose wrinkle in confusion he gave her a soft smile and felt air return to his lungs. Jesus Christ she was cute. "I'm willing to try," he whispered. "I'm willing to try for us," he repeated as Hopper's large left hand came down to the small of Joyce's back pulling her flush to his body as he bent to capture her lips in a kiss that turned from sweet and soft to firm and needy within three seconds of contact.



Joyce gasped into Hop's open mouth. Her desperation getting the best of her she rose to her tiptoes and craned her neck back just to keep the connection. His tongue danced against hers and she sought his mouth as well to taste him again. He tasted of mint and a hint of something sweet. Joyce pulled away and Hopper groaned. As she backed up she shimmied out of her slacks and kicked off her shoes leaving herself clad only in her underwear. Hopper stood with his mouth slightly open tracking all her movements. Suddenly his hand reached out and he caught her chin in his palm, turning her eyes up to his face, "anything happens you don't like, anything hurts, you tell me ok?"

Joyce turned her chin downward and kissed the palm of his massive hand, "I'll tell you." She made eye contact as she swore the three little words and Hopper took a deep and steadying breath.

"In that case," Hopper declared, "I'm overdressed." Joyce watched in eager fascination as Hopper made a move for the button on his slacks and she damn near giggled as, once he downed the zipper, the couldn't drop easily off due to his magnificently engorged cock tenting them up in the front. Hopper groused at his pants and took the opportunity to toss his cane aside and pull his long sleeved loose sweater over his head.

Joyce came back forward as naked skin was revealed for her consumption. She heard a moan of satisfaction rumble through Hopper's chest as her open mouth made contact with the flesh there. He dropped the sweater to his side and went to push his pants over his hips but he found her hands already engaged at that location so he opted, instead, to thread his fingers through wild hair and hold her to his chest. His breath came out in short moans that seemed to only accentuate her hums of enjoyment as his pants hit the floor. Clad only in their underwear Joyce began to sink to her knees before Hopper, her right hand cupping his underwear clad hardness as she moved, but was surprised when his hands came firmly to her biceps.

Joyce looked up under hooded eyes and was pleasantly surprised to meet blown pupils and see Hopper chewing on his lower lip. "Joyce I ain't gonna fucking last if you do that. I probably aint gonna last at all." He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment willing his body to give him a moment to regroup. "Besides," he ground out motioning to his

cock with a winsome smile, “I don’t need any extra encouragement.”

“Okay,” Joyce said softly as she backed away; knees coming flush to the bed. “You tell me what you want.”

Fucking breathing was becoming an issue for Hopper. First he could, then he couldn’t, it was gasping, stuttering, and now..... fuck. She wanted to know what he wanted.

“I’d like to put my mouth on you,” Hopper caught her eyes and didn’t miss the blush that crept up her neck. She was too adorable, they’d done damn near everything in the book, this wasn’t any different and, yet, he supposed it was. “And, then, when I make you come that way, I’d like to make you come again on my hand.”

Hopper noted, with some satisfaction, that Joyce’s arms had broken out in goosebumps and she’d brought her hands to her quivering stomach.

“Then,” Hopper continued, “after that, I’d very much like to be inside you until you pass out from everything I can give you. When that is done I want to come inside you, fill you up, and, when you’re full like that, I want to make you come one last time on my fingers and watch as all that I’ve left inside marks you inside and out.”

Joyce shuddered. Her mouth open; tongue darting out to wet her bottom lip.

“That’s what I want,” Hopper growled, stalking forward. “Is that okay with you?”

Joyce nodded silently.

“Good.”

Hopper was on her now, around her, and Joyce couldn’t quite make sense of how he was moving like that without his cane. He grunted as he bent down to put both hands on her ass cheeks and she hopped and was lifted, easily, into his arms. Hopper plundered her mouth and Joyce couldn’t remember, later, when exactly she lost her underwear but, she would find them torn to shreds in the corner. The bra she would remember. Worn elastic straps snapping under needy,

unapologetic, hands.

Someone mumbled ‘Fuck’ and Hopper wasn’t sure if it was him or her. It may have been both of them. He felt Joyce’s teeth on his ear and his eyes nearly crossed. Hopper dropped Joyce and chuckled when he heard her squeak as she hit the bed. Awkwardly, it couldn’t be denied, but, as gracefully as possibly, Hopper slid to his knees. He used his palms to catch himself against the edge of the bed and didn’t miss the look that crossed Joyce’s face from playful to concerned as he groaned at contact with the ground.

“I’m all right,” he assured her, sliding a warm and heavy palm up the inside of her right leg. Joyce reached down to run fingertips through thinning sandy hair along the crown of his head.

“Yes,” she sighed, “but, I can move up if that would be...” her last thoughts died on her tongue and his warm mouth found her clit and her eyes slid closed.

Hopper put everything he had into this time. He put everything he had into every time but, this time the end result would be different. This time he had to make sure she was ready for him. Pain; he couldn’t be the cause. God, she was so Goddamn small. Even against his mouth he felt like his lips could span her groin. Pain. This would hurt her. His fingers looked huge on her thighs. Hopper glanced up away from his thoughts and found Joyce had propped up her head on her palm and was studying him. He stopped and took his face a few inches; “Everything okay,” he whispered.

“Was about to ask you the same thing,” she replied with a lazy smile.

Hopper groaned and rubbed his face with one massive paw. “Joyce, I,” he was prepared for a fight. It was on him. He couldn’t let it go. But, her face didn’t contort again in frustration, her features didn’t crease into a pre-fight frown, instead, Joyce sat up so rapidly she almost headbutted him. She kissed him then and, if they hadn’t been naked with him sporting a waning erection, Hopper would’ve called it sweet. It was the kind of kiss shared by couples that have been together for twenty years, the kind of kiss shared right before bed, the kind to thank your husband for a great dinner, or doing the dishes. Hopper remembered kisses like that with Diane. Reminders of

a comfortable kind of love. A love, Hopper realized in that moment, he didn't feel like he'd ever deserve again. A love that a broken man didn't get because he deserved it, a love that could never really be earned. No, this was the kind of love that could only be freely given from someone you truly let inside, someone who knew you; and loved you anyway.

Joyce pulled back and softly and, as if she might spook him, let her palm cup the right side of his face. "Let me," she whispered, as she wrapped a soft palm around his manhood.

Hopper gasped but did his best to keep eye contact.

Joyce worked him slowly, one hand stroking his face and the other loosely on his cock while, intermittently, peppering his lips and cheeks with soft kisses. He wanted this, he had told her that, but he was still too wound up. She wanted him; desperately she wanted him but, she realized, in those few soft seconds, that she would have to be the one. She would have to be the one, again, to show him it was okay. All the pain, fear, and hurt inside one man was nothing to him in comparison to his feelings of need to protect her; from him. Joyce let her hand slip free of Jim's, now fully erect, cock and did her best not to smile with some small semblance of satisfaction when she heard the soft groan he tried to hide.

"Lay down," Joyce spoke softly in an attempt not to break the ethereal moment between them.

Hopper climbed onto the bed on all fours before rolling to his back in the middle. His hands opened and closed at his sides, fingers clenching. Only a few short minutes ago he'd been so sure of himself and now, now he was helpless under this tiny fierce woman.

She straddled him then and Hopper's eyes nearly crossed as the wetness from her core slid along his abdomen as she worked her way down the length of his body. She was wet, for him. He'd barely had sixty seconds between her legs so he knew that wasn't him. That was her; she wanted this as much as he did. Hopper's hands came to her hips and Joyce stilled. "Are you sure," Hopper rasped. "No condom?"

Joyce nodded with a smile. "Will was hard, the labor, there's not a

chance of that anymore.” Hopper could have sworn he saw the slightest slip of sadness ghost over Joyce’s face at the implication of her statement. “And,” she continued, “I trust you.”

Hopper’s breath hitched in his throat and his hands loosened on her hips as she settled over his cock. She took her time, sliding back and forth over the length of him, spreading the moisture over his shaft. Hopper felt his mind slate blank with need, a carnal force to flip her small frame and pound into her but he fought the urge and watched with rapt attention as Joyce lifted herself up into a crouch using her toes for balance. Her hand circled the length of him and she glanced up for one final check in before moving. Their eyes met and Hopper croaked out a noise he would’ve mocked as weak from any other man before he spoke,

“Joyce?”

“Yeah Hop.”

“I love you.”

The soft constant smile that had played over Joyce’s features since she took control bloomed a little wider.

“I love you too.”

Joyce was a little apprehensive. She was too old not to be truthful with herself. They’d been through too much for lies. Hop’s cock stood a little over eight inches, maybe closer to nine and, even her special toy wasn’t anywhere near his size. The thickness of him seemed larger in this moment as well. She’d gone down on him several times but, now, as she slipped the fat mushroomed head of him past her entrance, it seemed that he was larger than she’d realized before. Joyce met Hop’s gaze and the look of pure adoration almost caused her to lose her balance. She leaned forward and placed both hands flat on his chest. Hop’s palms came to cover hers there almost as a reflex and, groaning, Joyce pushed back, impaling herself on ecstasy.

Hopper choked on her name. “Joyce fuck.” The heat of her was unlike anything he’d felt in years, maybe ever. She was so tight his eyes crossed with the effort of trying not to blow his load like a

teenager. When he checked in he was horrified to see her eyes squeezed shut and what appeared to be pain on her features. His head cleared instantly and his hand shot to her face, cupping her jaw. "Joyce," Hopper begged, "look at me. Do you need to stop?"

Joyce was in a gossamer state; fighting only to feel. He was so big she felt as if she'd been split in half but, God, oh God, it felt so fucking good. She felt full, right, whole..... He was speaking. He was talking and she couldn't quite focus on his words. 'Stop.' He'd said 'stop.' Joyce's eyes fluttered open and she saw the concern. "God, no," she choked out. "Please don't stop. I just need a second."

Hopper nodded trying to focus on her and not the velvet vice around his cock. He needed her to feel what he was feeling. He needed to make it as good for her as it was for him. Hopper brought his right thumb to his mouth and sucked, coating it with saliva before slipping it between them to where their bodies met and stroking against her turgid clit. Joyce bucked and cried out against him, her internal muscles spasming and causing him to groan. "Yeah?" He questioned drawing her gaze back to him with his left palm against her cheek.

"Yeah," Joyce nodded.

Hopper brought his left thumb to his mouth, giving it the same treatment as the right, before plucking at firm nipples that sat, like ripe fruit, before him. Clit and breasts back and forth Hopper concentrated on his actions trying his best to delay the inevitable as Joyce started to move. She raised and lowered herself a dozen times each time her cries climbing higher than the last suddenly she collapsed against his chest. Confused, as he hadn't felt the tell tale signs of an orgasm, Hopper stroked her hair as she caught her breath.

"You okay?" Hop whispered into the top of Joyce's head. He felt her nod against his chest.

"I need you to help me," Joyce whispered. "I'm so...."

It was Hopper's turn to understand, to just know. It was overwhelming. He felt it too. "What do you need?"

Joyce chuckled, "The stamina of a twenty year old."

Hopper nuzzled against the top of her head. He was still inside her, and still hard, but, in that moment he felt like he could stay with her like this forever. She didn't just want this; she needed him to help her. They were equals here. He was woefully inadequate in his mind but she, his Joyce, needed him. Whatever she needed, he would make it happen. Hopper bit at his bottom lip before wrapping his arms around her tightly and holding her to his chest as he readjusted to place his feet flat on the bed. Realizing the change in position and what he was going for Joyce sat back up letting Hopper slip even further inside her as she leaned back against his bent legs. She let out a sigh as she felt him touch the top of her, bumping her cervix as she settled against his thighs. "Let me help," Hop said as he wrapped his hands firmly around her hips. She weighed nothing. Even as out of shape as he was now, even as starved as he'd been over there, she still felt like she weighed nothing in his hands. Slowly, watching her face he lifted her up and brought her back down as he thrust up.

Joyce coughed out a curse.

"Okay?"

"God, yes," Joyce grunted, "so good."

Hopper smiled.

Joyce brought her hands to his knees in an attempt to stabilize herself as he picked her up a few inches and brought her back down again. Fucking hell she didn't think she could come like this, it was so much, too much, but, God in heaven she didn't want it to stop. Every thrust up he hit the top of her sparking that sweet spot between pleasure and pain.

"Touch yourself."

Joyce looked down to meet hooded demanding eyes and saw sweat had broken out over Hopper's face as he picked up the pace.

"Touch yourself," Hopper grunted again. He was so close he didn't know how much longer he could hold it together and he wanted her there with him.

Joyce nodded adamantly and brought her middle three fingers to her mouth, wetting them before bringing them to the place where they were joined. She rubbed furiously trying to match the desperation so clearly written on Hop's face.

"Fuck," Hopper grunted. He felt it start in his balls and pull through the back of his spine. "Fuck Joyce, I'm gonna come."

Joyce nodded adamantly, "Yes, please, I want to feel you. Please."

Hopper shook his head trying to clear the insanity of such a filthy request from such a perfect woman, trying to stave off the inevitable just a few more seconds so she would join him.

Joyce knew she wasn't going to come like this from the first request he'd made to touch herself but that didn't matter to her. The pleasure was still there, like fire in her veins, even if the end wasn't met. She watched with utter devotion as James Hopper spasmed beneath her. His body went taught and she winced slightly as his last thrust brought her down hard to grind his pelvic bone against her. He held her there with fingertips biting into her hips so hard she knew they would bruise as she felt him jerk and spend inside her.

James Hopper had never left a woman unsatisfied with him; to the best of his knowledge. And, as his vision cleared he realized, in abject horror, that he never felt Joyce climax. He let his legs fall flat to the bed and drew Joyce down against his chest tightly, with both arms, letting his breathing settle. When he felt as if he could properly form words again he spoke into her hair. "You didn't; did you?"

Joyce shook her head no against his chest and Hopper sighed. Then, suddenly, surprising them both with his bought of agility, Hop flipped and came to rest on his side next to Joyce laying flat on her back where he had been only moments before. Joyce gasped, not only at the unexpected position change but also at the sudden loss of fullness. "So," Hopper grunted, "that was different then what I had planned but, I believe I promised you an encore."

Joyce writhed against the pressure as Hopper brought a massive palm to her core. A mess with her own fluids, and his, the squelch it made as he thrust two fingers easily into her stretched core was obscene.



Joyce's back bowed as the fire in her veins reignited and her pelvis began to counter thrust against his palm; seemingly with a mind of its own.

"Do you know how fucking beautiful you are?"

The question startled Joyce and she opened her eyes to see Hopper's line of sight quickly oscillating between the mess between her legs and her face.

"So Goddamn beautiful. So perfect."

Hopper brought his thumb to her clit and Joyce screamed out, bearing down, almost there.

"To see you like this, a mess with me, to know that you let me do this with you, to you. So perfect. I want you like this always. Always wet for me, always wet with me, always waiting and ready to show me this side of you; only for me."

'Only for me,' with those words, Joyce's body tightened, impossibly, tighter and started to shake. Hopper felt a wash of satisfaction slip through him as he watched her scream, gasp, and ride his hand; a flood of further wet coating his palm as her inner muscles tried to pull his fingers deeper still. He stayed inside her until it was over; watching as her bliss turned to, what he had loving started referring to as the sleepy kitten faze of her post orgasmic bliss.

Joyce felt boneless. She stretched out and sighed and she felt the bed dip and Hopper leave. She hoped he came back but she was having difficulty getting her hazy brain to make words. She felt something warm against her legs and when she cracked her eyes she saw Hopper with a washcloth gently wiping her inner thighs. At some point the washcloth went away and she felt a cover being pulled over her naked form. She looked up to see Hopper standing by the side of the bed; still nude.

Joyce held out her hand, "Lay with me?"

Hopper shook his head, "Not a good idea. I might fall asleep."

Joyce gave her best impression of a toddler's pouty lower lip and

Hopper chuckled. “How about I sit with you for a while?” Joyce smiled and nodded.

Hopper climbed back up into the king sized bed and scooted until his back was resting against the headboard. After a little bit of maneuvering to put pillows behind his lower back he wrapped his arm around Joyce’s frame. He smiled and sighed and she shifted to rest her head in his lap. Glancing over at the clock he noted the time. They had the rest of this evening and one more full day together alone. And, if he didn’t move from this spot, if they made love another ten times, or if they put on clothes and watched TV together he’d be happy. Hopper pulled Joyce a little closer and softly stroked her hair as her breathing evened and she fell asleep.

For the first time in over a decade James Hopper could say he was happy.

**Author’s Note:**

Thank you for reading and, as always, until next time....

Cheers and Happy Writing,

Rev